

Sight & Sound

Monthly
Film Review

April

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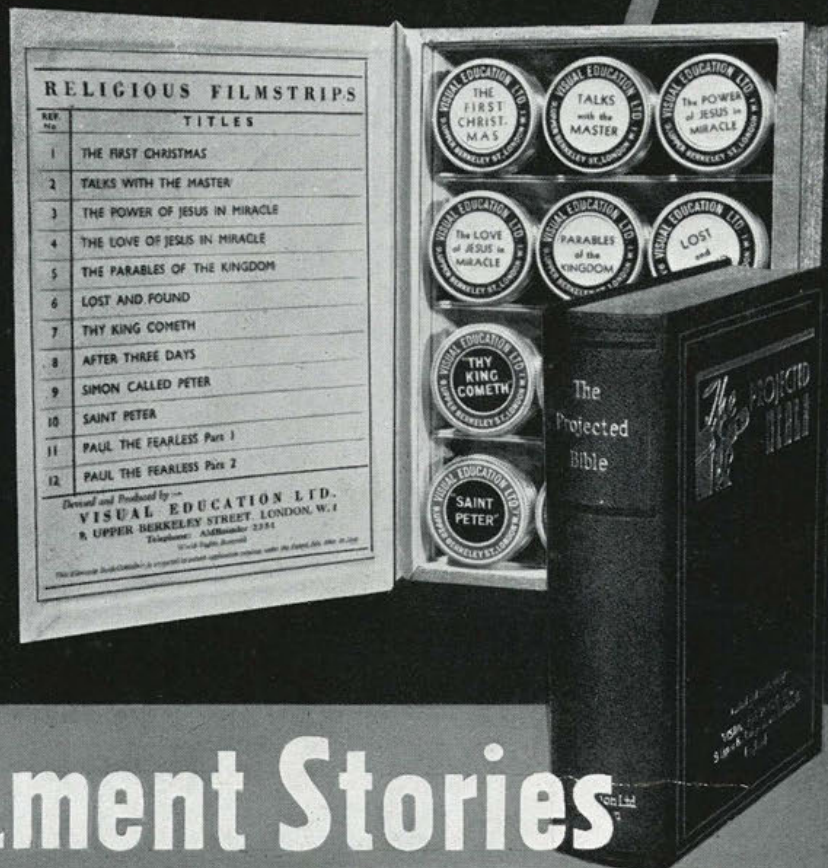
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ON THE COVER: Gene Kelly and Vera Ellen in *On the Town*

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The Front Page

AN ODD EVENT occurred in London a few weeks ago, the implications of which seem to have been generally neglected. As a result of violent disturbances, and the aiming of various missiles (including smoke bombs) at the screen of the New Gallery cinema, Regent Street, an American film inimical to Britain on the Palestine question, *Sword in the Desert*, was withdrawn after a few days' run—the police declining further responsibility after a threat of more ominous demonstrations. The principle involved—of a film being simply withdrawn from circulation because of minority hooliganism—is discussed this month by Michael Clarke.

In order to record the personal opinions and beliefs of those actively connected with films on the present creative position of the British cinema, SIGHT AND SOUND is organising a Round Table debate, at which various directors, producers and critics will put forth and discuss their views. Those taking part include Anthony Havelock-Allan, Rosamund John, Thorold Dickinson, Frank Launder, Henry Cornelius, Guy Morgan, George Minter and Rachael Low. The chairman will be Basil Wright, and a verbatim account will be published in our next issue.

The picture opposite shows Hoagy Carmichael (at piano) and Kirk Douglas (left centre, with trumpet) in a forthcoming American film, *Young Man of Music* (see page 66).

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Stills:

NATIONAL FILM LIBRARY for early Asta Nielsen pictures, *Siegfried*, *Pygmalion*, *On Approval*, *Driegroschenoper*, *Oh Mr. Porter*, *Les Parents Terribles*, *The Pilgrim*.

EALING STUDIOS for *Whisky Galore*, *The Blue Lamp*, *A Run For Your Money*, *Passport to Pimlico*.

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UNIVERSAL-INTERNATIONAL for *Sword in the Desert*.

WARNER BROS. for *Young Man of Music*.

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ALLEN & UNWIN for *The Art Of Our Age* by Ernest Lindgren.

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PASTORAL SCENE from
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POINTS OF VIEW

SIR ROBERT WATSON-WATT's letter in last month's SIGHT AND SOUND raised a number of interesting points. Operational Research is in itself a technological development of great importance; its record during the war was more than impressive, its value in the present dollar age as an aid to industry is immeasurable. The application of such a potent industrial weapon to film production is bound to be both complex and risky: in the strictly economical field (supposing, for example, that Britain were to develop a healthy second feature industry), it may yet achieve much. But Sir Robert Watson-Watt's letter categorically enlarged its terms of reference to questions of art as well as industry, and on this point one is obliged to issue grave warning.

The problem is crystallised in one of the questions which, the letter informed us, Operational Research is setting out to answer. This is: "To what extent and in what ways are the Independent Frame techniques economically and artistically valuable?" Herein, many implications are contained. It would be very interesting to know, firstly, what person or group of persons is being entrusted with a decision of such moment, and on what evidence this decision will be based. For it would seem that no such decision could be made at all without the evidence of at least one artist who has used the Independent Frame technique. Several productions employing this technique have now been shown to the press and the public, but none suggests, even remotely, that an artist was involved in the making of them. No conclusions regarding artistic values can possibly be garnered from *A Warning to Wantons*, *Floodtide*, *Stop Press Girl*, *Boys in Brown* or even *Under the Frozen Falls*. The most that can be said is that their process work, as such, passed unnoticed by sufficient members of the general public, and that (as regards *Floodtide*) second-hand location work on back-projection plates is greatly inferior to the real thing. If a film-maker of creative gifts had experimented with Independent Frame, then no doubt an instructive comparison could be drawn between this venture and his other work; so far, however no such director appears to have shown himself willing to tackle the process.

There are, then, two essentials before any conclusions of real value can be drawn. The first is, works of artistic merit to be judged; and the second, critics of good perception to judge them. As a technological unit, Operational Research performed great service during the war in saving lives and manhours; but in Sir Robert Watson-Watt's letter there is nothing to imply that in adapting itself to peacetime film production it has in any way extended

itself beyond a "tool of industry". While no doubt his Partnership is capable of judging the advantages of Independent Frame, Back Projection, Travelling Mats and so on as aids to economic production, there is no reason whatsoever to suppose it qualified to judge their artistic values or liabilities. Whether one calls a thing "an inquiry into the relative costs of panning shots and straight cuts", as SIGHT AND SOUND did, or "an analysis of viewpoint durations", as his letter did, the result is surely much the same. To claim that any general conclusions involving the artist can be drawn from them, shows a complete lack of understanding of the artist's function: he makes his impact through his individuality, his technique is shaped by his material, and statistical research into "the length of time for which the filmgoer is called upon to look at one viewpoint on the screen either before the camera moves or before the cut occurs", can have no bearing on him.

This is not to suggest that investigations into cutting down of production costs are superfluous. Of course they are vitally important, all the more so at the present time. Nor is it being suggested that every film should be made or judged as a work of art; a good standard of bread-and-butter production is a healthy thing, and commercially a necessary one. But at least let the two factors be kept apart. By all means let films be made competently and cheaply by Independent Frame, if this proves respectable—but that is no reason for further harassing the few artists in British film production. If one looks at the best British films of recent months, is it even necessary to ask what would have been the artistic loss if the intricate panning shots of *Queen of Spades* had deferred to travelling mats, if the Vienna of *The Third Man* had been established against back-projection plates? Or compare, for location work, *Whisky Galore* and *Floodtide*. . . .

It is vital to get the issues clear. Nothing is more sensible than to apply the best factory methods to the factory product, but if Operational Research is going to confuse this with art, it is unlikely to get beyond the present stage of "patient gropings". More concrete terms of reference are needed before anything can be established beyond the now fairly obvious fact that *some* directors can make *some* films for, say, £120,000, by using various time- and labour-saving methods. Then, when Operational Research also considers that *Whisky Galore* cost no more to make than the Independent Frame films, it may well hesitate before "individual belief is converted into general knowledge".

ASTA NIELSEN

John H. Winge



Left: Asta Nielsen in the 'twenties. Right: as Hamlet in the German silent film.

AT A TIME when sex appeal was all that was wanted in the flickers, Asta Nielsen showed a bony figure and a long and unpretty face, but she broke all the rules of her day and also of her future when she became the world's greatest star—by the sheer fascination of her art of acting. She introduced stylized acting into a hodgepodge of low naturalism and plain amateurishness. Purpose and form of her acting showed off the accidental nature of the crowd photographed as her partners. She was as masterful in tragedy as she was in comedy, and never was she conventional. Unfortunately she has not appeared in a picture that was great in itself, but all of them were carried by her unique personality and the unforgettable beauty of her gesturing.

Most of her pictures were made in Germany (notably a silent version of *Hamlet* and Pabst's *Joyless Street*), but she refused to work under Nazi rule and returned in 1937 to her Danish fatherland, leaving behind her house and two-thirds of her money according to the Nazi rules of that time. She has not done a thing since her return to

Copenhagen. Her funds running low, she asked the government for a licence to run a cinema. It has been refused to her several times. The reason: she is considered a "German actress" because she became famous in pictures made in Germany.

This does not sound like a convincing or just reason, and Asta Nielsen's bitterness is understandable. I saw her in her Copenhagen flat, a couple of blocks away from Carl Dreyer's. It is full of large and beautiful antiques, but somehow cold and empty. And there is Asta herself: she still wears her world-renowned bangs, but her hair is not jet black any more. It is reddish by a hair-dyer's favour. Face and figure have rounded themselves a bit, but there are still the large burning black eyes of hers, the expressive hands and their strange and beautiful gesturing, and the young, stormy temperament of the great artist. I admire the delicately shaped nose of hers, the pointed chin with the slight and joking pouch underneath. Asta Nielsen is older now, but she is quite unchanged in temper and in the way of her own and very personal beauty. She has only to



"Ewige Nat." Nielsen as a blind girl.

begin to speak, and there is all of her and no day has passed.

But Asta Nielsen, who scarcely had an equal on the screen, is forgotten. For sixteen years, exactly as long as the day of Hitler's seizure of power, she has not made a picture. The Danes have arbitrarily declared her a German and the Germans have kicked her out because she did not conform with Nazidom. A few years ago she wrote her memoirs—an important part of motion picture history. The book was published in Denmark and became a great success, because even the younger generation that had never seen her, had heard her fabulous name. No doubt, Asta Nielsen is able to-day to show new generations of audiences and players how motion picture acting can be as delicate and refined as the description of a sundown by a Chinese painter. She would still be not only the greatest actress, but also the greatest teacher.



Above right: Asta Nielsen (left) in "Joyless Street." Below, right: Asta Nielsen in Copenhagen a few weeks ago.

CENSORSHIP BY VIOLENCE?

Michael Clarke

IF A BOND STREET JEWELLER, threatened with robbery by a gang of thieves, were to appeal to the police, he would be surprised if Scotland Yard advised him to close down, since the police could not undertake to protect those whose lawful business gave temptation to wrongdoers, nor be responsible for public safety in face of a possible smash-and-grab raid. This analogy with the *Sword in the Desert* case is not unjust. What are the facts of the affair, which raises an issue of principle important to all concerned with the cinema?

This American film deals, in apparently a highly coloured and anti-British way, with events during the final days of the British Mandate in Palestine. It favours the Jewish side in the Palestine dispute. Although certain to be controversial in Britain, the film was released here by General Film Distributors, who rented it to the London New Gallery cinema.

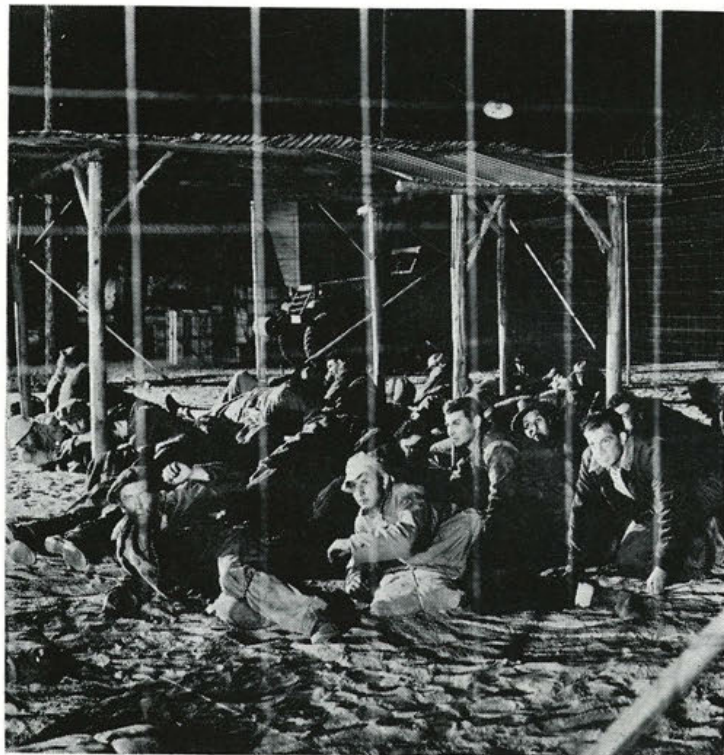
During early performances, there was some rowdiness, which police, stationed in the auditorium, were able to prevent. However, Sir Frank Newsam, Permanent Secretary to the Home Office, received word that a further outbreak, which might endanger the lives of large numbers of people, had been threatened. He got into immediate touch with the London County Council, whose Public Control Committee advised the New Gallery manager to take the film off. The terms of L.C.C. licences to cinemas require that no film be exhibited which might cause a public disturbance.

Mr. Victor Mishcon, Chairman of the Public Control Committee, stated at the next meeting of the L.C.C. that "fascist hooligans" were responsible for the disturbances, and that he understood that the police "could not and would not" be responsible for public safety if the film continued to be shown. In this situation, the Committee clearly had no alternative but to advise the cinema manager to withdraw the film, though Mr. Mishcon emphasised that the Council had not banned it.

The result is that a minority element has succeeded, against the best (apparently) that the Metropolitan Police could do, in effectively banning a film which—whatever its merits—had the right to be seen. From this the reader may draw any political conclusion he likes; the direct concern here is with the appearance of an arbitrary censorship by violence.

The power of the cinema to fight against racial hatred is great; thus it is no surprise to learn that a letter, claiming responsibility for the New Gallery disturbances and expressing satisfaction at the banning of the film, has been found on the notepaper of an organisation that thrives upon race hatred, the "British League of Ex-Servicemen". The activities of the League in other quarters are well known, and the signatory of the letter is reputed to have been a former organiser of the British Union of Fascists.

But is the power of film to be negated so swiftly by a gang of rowdies? I remember that in Palestine itself, cinemas were occasionally threatened with a bomb in the auditorium; and on one occasion at least the police "frisked" the audience as it entered. The process was undignified, but at least one saw the film. In London, however, the police apparently are not prepared to support



"Sword in the Desert." Dana Andrews (right)

the makers or the viewers of films against the threats of a violent minority.

I hold no brief for *Sword in the Desert*—I cannot, because I am unable to see it. Indeed, the distributors are not even prepared, at present, to produce a copy for private viewing. But this much is clear: because the film is anti-British in tone, because it voices *political* hostility to Britain, because it professes what purports to be the Jewish cause, it was attacked by a fascist group.

What causes concern is that films far better, which specifically oppose racial hatred, might have been or may be selected for this violent censorship. A serious and responsible anti-British film on the Palestine question is, after all, conceivable; it would almost certainly have met a similar fate. British equivalents of *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*, which used the Jewish problem in America as a vehicle to preach against race hatred, might well have provided a target for the same people. As it was, the American films were generally seen, and each did something to enhance our liberties and our tolerance. But neither freedom nor tolerance can be encouraged if films are to be judged and condemned in advance by thugs. There are plenty of democratic ways of opposing the film you do not like: bombs are not included among them.

Mr. Mishcon, at the L.C.C. meeting, showed himself disturbed at the attitude of police and Home Office. I understand now that the L.C.C. is seeking an interview with the Home Secretary, at which the important issues raised by this affair will no doubt be discussed. Meanwhile, let it not be thought that the matter is ended; so far, it is a victory for those who do not admit the freedom of the film-maker to say what he likes, nor of the filmgoer to see what he chooses.

INTERVIEW WITH DE SICA

Francis Koval

WE LIVE IN A very rapidly changing world; it is sometimes pretty difficult to change one's ideas accordingly at the appropriate speed. It needs a mental effort to associate with evil and destruction a name that only yesterday symbolised a heroic personality. And vice versa. . . .

It needed a still greater mental effort on my part to accept the name of Vittorio de Sica as the hall-mark of exquisite film direction, when I saw one of his first post-war films: the famous *Shoeshine*. I still too vividly remembered the associations of ideas that his name conjured up in pre-war Italy. For fifteen years, in fact, he was the idol of all the teen-age "signorinas", the attractive, witty, elegant leading man of innumerable Italian screen-comedies, some of them amusing and polished, others less so. The public admired and loved the slick man-about-town figure, but hardly anybody suspected in him, beyond his indubitable acting talent, the spark of inspiration that distinguishes the creative artist.

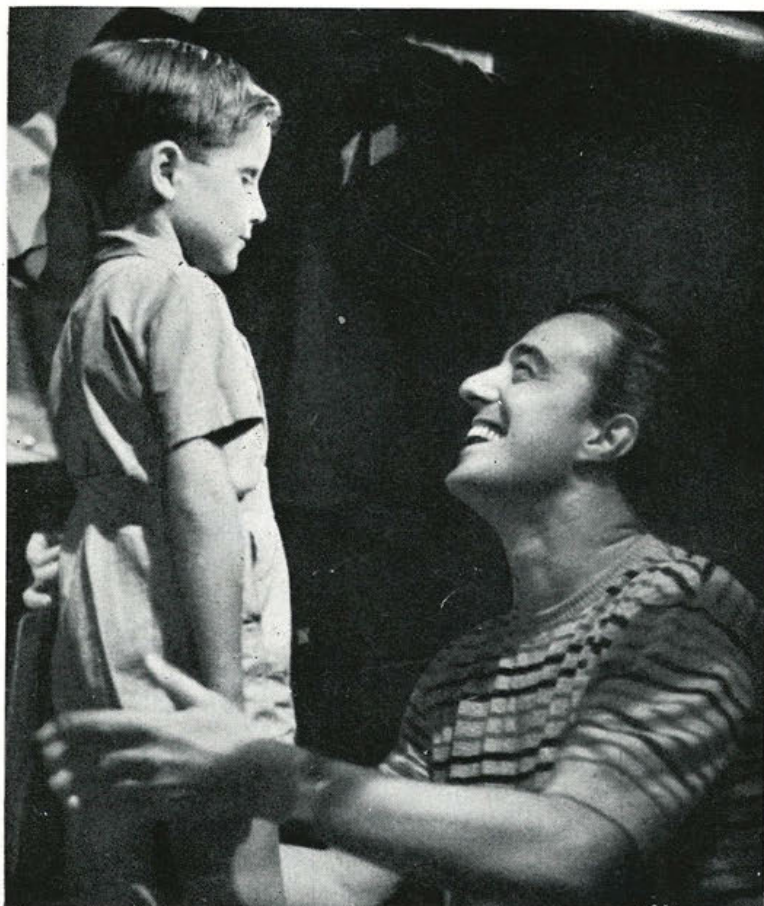
To understand my feelings on meeting de Sica one has to imagine a London film critic who returns to the capital after a long absence and learns to his astonishment that Michael Wilding has in the meantime become a sort of a second Carol Reed.

"Yes", said Vittorio de Sica, stroking his greying hair and smiling as charmingly as ever, when I explained this to him, "in those fifteen years of my acting career I made something like thirty-five pictures—and I don't regret it. I felt at my best in those directed by Mario Camerini. But even so—for fifteen years I played comic parts with my ideas of tragedy deeply hidden. And now I am a character between two ages: the physical age as shown by my grey hair and the spiritual one, full of dreams worthy of a youth of twenty. . . ."

This description of himself struck me as remarkably accurate and at the same time as typical of the kind of romantic language in which he likes to express his thoughts. I could not help wondering what kind of a chartered accountant this man of 48 would have made, had he followed the career chosen for him, after leaving the "Scuola di Ragioneria" (Accountancy College). At any rate, even the most perfect of his balance sheets would hardly have provided the public with such enjoyment as his films did, even his early ones.

In fact, some of his pre-war comedies and comedy-thrillers were so popular that titles like *Gli Uomini Che Mascalzoni* (Men, what Scoundrels) (1931), *Il Signore Desidera?* (1934), *Daro un Milione* (I'll give a Million) (1935), or *Hanno Rapito un Uomo* (They Kidnapped a Man) (1938) were a by-word with the Italian public, and this at a time when the average cinema-goer in Italy used to avoid carefully the cinemas showing Italian films. More than once did my friends in Rome persuade me to join a cinema queue by saying: "Let's go! It's an Italian picture, but it's a de Sica. It ought to be fun".

This period of de Sica's life is also of great importance in the context of Italy's political development, which did



De Sica with children. Above, "I Bambino ci Guardano." Below, Rinaldo Smordoni and Franco Interlenghi in "Shoeshine."

not leave the cinema unaffected. The more firmly the Fascist regime established itself, the more were films considered as a propaganda weapon. Restrictions imposed by the administration on any kind of original ideas grew so strong that in the end all the film-makers were forced to submit to the discipline of the "Party Line", and we could see even people like Roberto Rossellini collaborating on a propaganda film like *Luciano Serra—Pilota*, a bumptious glorification of the Abyssinian war. But Vittorio de Sica's activity as a popular actor was outside the frame of political regimentation and allowed him to stay in films without compromising himself. It may also well be that his ideas needed that time to mature quietly, without interference from outside.

He first tried his hand at directing shortly after the outbreak of war (Italy was neutral then) and turned out a successful but conventional picture called *Rose Scarlate*, adapted from the play "Two Dozen Red Roses" shown on a London stage in 1940.

In 1940 he not only directed but also played the principal part in a film of much greater scope: *Maddalena, Zero in Condotta*. Still stronger was the imprint of his personality on *Teresa Venerdi* made a year later, a film for which, as well as acting and directing, he also wrote the script. It was in this picture, incidentally, that de Sica offered the first real chance to Anna Magnani, who up to then mostly appeared in music-hall and was a kind of Gracie Fields "à l'italienne". He then proved his mettle as director in a delightful period-film *Un Garibaldino in Convento* in which he also took a small part, and in the widely acclaimed *I Bambini ci Guardano* (*The Children Look at Us*). Among his notable post-war films not shown in this country yet are *Natale al Campo 119* (*Christmas at Camp 119*) and *La Porta del Cielo* (*The Gate of Heaven*).

When I asked Vittorio de Sica a few questions about the production of *Bicycle Thieves*, he answered them with remarkable frankness.

He took the main idea from one of Luigi Bartoli's novels and started working on the script with his friend Cesare Zavattini long before he knew whether he would ever be able to put his plans into practice. Although many producers liked the idea, financial backers could not be found either in London or in New York. Selznick—it is true—offered his dollars, but on condition that Cary Grant played the main part. This was unacceptable to Vittorio. "This is a subject which can only be turned into a success by a cast of ordinary people picked up in the street", he maintained stubbornly. But he stuck to his guns and in the end put his own money into the venture, sharing the risk with some Milan industrialists. Thus the picture cost a fraction of the sum that a producer like Selznick would have spent on it: 60 million Lira, to be exact, which amounts to approximately £30,000.

The writing of the script (worked out to the most minute details), the casting, etc., took six months. The shooting—most of it in the streets of Rome, with casual passers-by used as extras and small-part players—was done in 70 days. When David Lean saw the unit working "on location" in the middle of a milling crowd, he just gasped and said: "That is what I would call working in an inferno!"

The casting was not an easy job either. Vittorio had a quite definite conception of the types he wanted for the

story and looked for them everywhere: in the cafés, parks, railway stations. One has to try that kind of "talent-scouting" once to appreciate the nervous tension and the feeling of frustration that it entails. The most difficult thing was, of course, to find a suitable child. As a result of an advertisement hundreds of parents brought their little boys to Vittorio de Sica's office. Not one of them corresponded to what he had in mind. But one father anxious to present his son caught the director's attention instead and was on the spot offered the part of Antonio, the bill-sticker. It was Lamberto Maggiorani, a fitter at the Breda factory, whose features have in the meantime become familiar to millions of cinema-goers all over the world. (Incidentally, no sooner was the picture finished than Lamberto Maggiorani was on the unemployed list, and hanging around the Labour Exchange every day exactly as he does at the beginning of his picture.)

One day one of the Rome dailies sent their woman reporter, Lianella Carell, to interview de Sica. She immediately struck him as exactly the type of woman he was looking for and she got the part of Antonio's resolute wife.

However, the first day of shooting drew nearer, and there was still no suitable boy to play Bruno, the most important rôle of the film. It is characteristic of Vittorio de Sica and his way of dealing with problems that he simply refused to give in, and started shooting the picture as if there were nothing to worry him. And it was only then, about a week or so after the start, that he suddenly met in the street an eight-year-old boy with the right kind of expression on his face: half comical, half tragic, and far from the Hollywood conception of child beauty. Thus Enzo Staiola, with his twinkling eyes and his drawling voice caused by adenoids, was tested and chosen at the eleventh hour.

The quiet objectivity of this account changes into enthusiastic emphasis when I ask the Italian director how he manages to get such superior performances out of non-professional actors and whether he finds it difficult to direct them.

"Not at all!" he says. "In many ways they are more flexible and more intensive in their reactions than professional actors. At first, of course, when they feel the eye of the camera fixed on them, they become very self-conscious, stiff and absurdly awkward. They cannot even sit down without upsetting the chair.

"My method to get them back to their natural selves again is simply to live with them for days, even for weeks on end, till they treat me as a friend and forget all about 'acting'. My experience as an actor helps me enormously to time the take and to catch them just at the right moment.

"I have a little theory of my own, why actually the results achieved with these ordinary people are often much more satisfactory than highly polished performances by actors.

"Let's give the image on the screen the value of 100 per cent. The man appearing in it by his mere presence as a living being covers 50 per cent. of that value, his non-professional acting is worth a further 30 per cent., and the remaining 20 per cent. are contributed by the spectator's own imagination.

"This balance is immediately disturbed if and when the professional actor—this admirable monster—contributes

not 30 but 50 per cent. The two other factors remaining unchanged, the image value mounts to 120 per cent. and that is what makes the screen-image often appear 'bigger than life', quite beyond the frame of reality.

"But I don't want to be misunderstood. This does not mean that I want to make all my future films without actors. Exactly as there are pictures crying out for a cast of 'ordinary people', there are others absolutely requiring professional actors only. My post-war film *Natale al Campo* 119 is a very good example of the latter type.

"My plans for the future? I certainly don't want to abandon acting altogether, but I feel I have arrived at a stage in my development where I should devote most of my energies to scripting and directing.

"Now I am working again with my friend Cesare Zavattini on the screen adaptation of one of his novels which will make a fantastic and grotesque film, quite unlike *Sciuscia* or *Ladri di Biciclette*. This is the story of a man, whose natural kindness and innate politeness of heart is such that it enables him to perform miracles, but is completely misunderstood by the crazy world around him".

After a special showing of *Bicycle Thieves* in Paris Vittorio de Sica was kissed in public on both cheeks by René Clair and congratulated by all the notabilities of the French cinema. Jean Cocteau said that he would not perhaps have sent his *Parents Terribles* to the Knokke Film Festival had he seen the Italian picture before. But on the other hand de Sica has been attacked on many counts, both in Italy and abroad. Some film-makers and journalists accused him of crude realism, of facile symbolism, of excessive pessimism, even of political bias. In front of all these charges he remained equable and to my request for defence answered:

"It is difficult, if not impossible, to argue with people who attribute to me ideas and intentions borrowed from their own mental make-up. I have accomplished what I wanted to accomplish, without any 'arrière-pensée'. Now I see my work exposed to the world's craze to attach a label to everything. I have nothing to do with that. I don't even like being called a 'neo-realist'.

"I had no intention of presenting Antonio as a kind of 'Everyman' or a personification of what is called to-day 'the under-privileged'. To me he was an individual, with his individual joys and worries, with his individual story. In presenting the one tragic Sunday of his long and varied life, I attempted to transpose reality into the poetical plane. This indeed seems to me one of the most important features of my work, because without such an attempt a film of this kind would simply become a newsreel. I don't see any future in our neo-realism if it does not surmount the barrier separating the documentary from drama and poetry. But of course, logic has always been an enemy of poetry. It takes a great artist to blend them harmoniously, and therefore I am not surprised if strict logicians point with accusing finger to flaws in my work.

"To those, however, who reproach me with excessive pessimism, because at the end of the film Antonio finds himself still without a bicycle, I should like to put the question: How many times in your life have you found yourself in a hopeless situation at the end of a day, without



The tragic comedian: Charlie Chaplin (in "The Pilgrim") to whom de Sica pays homage.

being broken by it?—I frankly believe that people who find the screen reality of *Ladri di Biciclette* so cruel as to dub the film 'black' and 'hopeless' have never lived through hardships themselves; such hardships, I mean as are experienced daily by millions of Antonios all over the world. Or perhaps they do not understand the mentality of an Italian who never takes things as seriously as people farther north. . . ."

The personality of Vittorio de Sica, sketchily reflected in these utterances of a disjointed and hasty interview would appear somehow incomplete if I didn't report his rather unexpected reply to my last and slightly conventional question:

"Who, in your opinion, has contributed most to the renaissance of the cinematic art since the end of the war?" I asked.

The answer comes without hesitation:

"Charlie Chaplin, of course. And not only since the end of the war, but since 1910 the cinema owes to him its greatest inspiration".

As I say good-bye to the maker of *Bicycle Thieves*, his words: "For fifteen years I played comic parts with my ideas of tragedy deeply hidden", suddenly come back to my mind and assume a new and deeper meaning.

ROME—PARIS—HOLLYWOOD



ROME

TWO NEW location films are *Il Lupo della Sila* (above) and *Stromboli* (left). *The Wolf of the Sila Mountains* tells of a community of woodcutters in the Calabrian mountains, and much of the film was shot there. It is directed by Coletti, who previously made a film about the war in Palestine, *The Earth Cries Out*. The leading players are Silvana Mangano, the sensational discovery of de Santis' *Bitter Rice* (soon to be shown in London), who has made history by retiring from the screen after this picture, finding the work too hard; and Jacques Sernas, recently seen in *The Golden Salamander*. The film will be seen in London later this year.

Stromboli was made, in case anyone has forgotten, by Roberto Rossellini, with Ingrid Bergman in the leading part. Its story, set on a volcanic Mediterranean island, is very similar to that of *Vulcano* with Anna Magnani. The two films opened almost simultaneously in Rome a few weeks ago. *Vulcano* was almost immediately banned by the Vatican; *Stromboli* escaped censure. It will be seen shortly in London.

PARIS

THE LONGEST and most ambitious film produced on the continent of Europe since *Les Enfants du Paradis* is *Fabiola* (right), a Franco-Italian bilingual venture under the aegis of the Roman Catholic church. The story is set in Rome during the early years of Christianity, and concerns a Christian hero, Henri Vidal (seen with Michèle Morgan in this picture). *Fabiola*, which lasts nearly four hours and is shown in two parts, was directed by Alessandro Blasetti; and the cast also includes Michel Simon and Louis Salou.

Pierre Brasseur and Arletty will be seen in *Portrait d'un Assassin* (below), a melodrama with a circus background. Brasseur plays a Wall of Death rider, Arletty his neglected wife. Erich von Stroheim, Maria Montez and Jules Berry also have important parts. *Portrait d'un Assassin* had a chequered history in the making. Orson Welles was originally to have directed it, and played Brasseur's part, but at the last moment he proved unavailable, and the film became the first assignment of a new young director, Bernard Roland.





HOLLYWOOD

TWO NEW American films of distinction, shortly to reach London, are *Young Man of Music* (left) and *All the King's Men* (below).

Young Man of Music, directed by Michael Curtiz from a novel by Dorothy Baker called "Young Man with a Horn" (title-change at request of censor) is the story of the life and death of a jazz soloist, played by Kirk Douglas (left, with Hoagy Carmichael). Other members of the cast are Lauren Bacall and Doris Day. The film was scripted by Carl Foreman, responsible for *Champion*, and has a notable musical score.

All the King's Men is the latest film (script and direction) of Robert Rossen, who made that excellent boxing picture, *Body and Soul*. Robert Penn Warren's novel tells of the career of an American politician, who begins with small-town honest ideals, is corrupted by success, and ends up as a big-town tycoon. He is played by Broderick Crawford (centre, below): other players are Mercedes McCambridge (left), John Ireland (right, in train), Joanne Dru and John Derek. Many scenes, interiors as well as exteriors, were shot on actual locations.



Second Opinion

SPACE, TIME AND THE POSSIBLE

Jacquetta Hawkes

WATCHING D. W. Griffith's *Hearts of the World* at the Institute's opening show, I felt as though I had been gently knocked on the head and carried back to 1917. The story and its sentiment, with every movement, every curl and whisker of the characters, seemed to have been consciously designed to give a period flavour, to make us understand 1917 as never before, and to see how much it belonged to an earlier world, how little to the one that was soon to be born. Looking through the flickering light at the many eminent backs and profiles ranged around me in the gallery, I wondered whether we represented such a distinctive period picture, whether our age would show so clear an outline. Only another cinema audience twenty years hence could answer my question.

The camera has this power to perpetuate a moment of time. A play, if it is great enough to survive, will be re-interpreted by each generation, but a film freezes the moment of its creation in all its particularity. Yet it is not this unsought preservative power that interests me most, but rather what the cinema can deliberately achieve in the mastering of time. I am not thinking of historical films; these can be valuable instruments of education or expensive costume parades, but they are not likely to penetrate into new fields of experience. What excites me, and what I believe film makers could exploit far more imaginatively, is their unparalleled control both of tempo and time sequence. Malraux has said that it is "art's very nature to seek to 'possess' space, time and the possible".

As a part of the mechanical concepts of the nineteenth century, we inherited a most cramping idea of time as a fixed linear progress, a kind of endless railway line. Now physics and philosophy are trying to open our eyes to our own blindness, to give us notions of time beyond direct human apprehension. The contemporary medium of the film is uniquely endowed for the expression of some of these ideas, for setting our imagination free from the railway line.

With no more than words and rhythm at their command, poets can exercise a strong emotional control over tempo, speeding and slowing the movement of their verse; novelists and dramatists stretch out a few significant minutes and then leap to and fro over years, often changing the single track order of events to give greater depth and meaning. But their freedom, especially that of dramatists, is closely limited; we may no longer wish to be tied by the classical unities, but senses and comprehension alike boggle at a violent manipulation of time within the rigid formalities of the stage.

The film, it seems to me, has greater freedom and greater opportunities, but does not use them boldly enough. I know that most good directors, Griffith himself among the pioneers, use variation in tempo with a subtlety hardly perceptible to the uninformed. Sometimes, too, they

experiment with time sequence. Yet there remains so much to explore.

There is the ability of the camera to accelerate and retard physical movements which otherwise are far beyond the reach of our perceptions. To see the motion of a galloping horse not only rendered visible but also transformed into something soft and gentle; to see the opening of a flower as a single act, these may be mere matters of mechanics, but already they are able to make us aware of the fallibility of our senses. For me, too, they have the beginning of poetry.

When, in the French film *Farrebique*, I first saw shadows lengthen and twilight fall visibly, like a wing sweeping over the countryside, then I felt that mechanics had really entered the realm of poetry; time had been possessed to such effect that sunset was given a new form and human experience had been extended.

These devices represent only a trivial beginning. There are many things which we can see in time no better than a person looking at Rubens with his eye an inch from the canvas. The film should enable us to step back. It astonishes me that no one, so far as I know, has begun to record the whole span of an individual life as a single æsthetic form. It would be necessary to provide for a succession of directors . . . it requires a long view! But after seventy years or so, what an extraordinary new experience would be offered, the unimaginable poignancy of witnessing a complete life, rising, falling, passing within a few hours. It would illumine not only time, but fate and freewill, for would not the sequence appear to be pre-ordained, as inevitable as a work of art?

This play on tempo can be said to represent a heightening of realism until it passes to something beyond itself; even more challenging are the direct attacks which the cinema can launch against temporal realism. On the stage we can only be given the outward reactions of individuals, or verbally expressed thoughts; on the screen the audience can be admitted to share the subjective experience of a character, to see the outer world as it appears to him from his private citadel—the view from inside the skull. If the audience shares these experiences, then it can also be made to share those curious fluctuations in the apprehension of time that are so intimate a part of emotion: the rhythms of grief, calm, happiness, ecstasy and despair as they are experienced from within.

These means for suggesting the subjective emotion of their characters are, I imagine, within the range of any good film maker. I have a conviction, hardly to be justified by words, that *genius* could use the cinema to reveal time, this fourth dimension in which we are enmeshed, in a way which has been attempted in the theatre but never achieved.

(Continued on page 73)

NOTHING TO LAUGH AT

Henry Raynor



Carol Reed's comedy of chorus girls, "*A Girl Must Live*" (1938). Renée Houston and Lilli Palmer (centre).

THE APPEARANCE in quick succession of four English comedies—*Passport to Pimlico*, *Whisky Galore*, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *A Run for your Money*—was greeted by the newspaper film-tipsters as a major victory of post-war production. About the same time as the first of these, too, appeared John Mills' *The History of Mr. Polly* which, if too conscientiously droll at times, was nevertheless in many respects a faithful picture of Wells' deflated, suburban-Byronic hero: a determination to be comic at all costs obscured the minor poet in Polly, but the film was not far from matching the gusto of Wells' invention, even if it failed to come nearer than implication to the hero's essential pathos.

Apart from these films, British studios have not given us much to laugh at in recent years, except accidentally. There is, for example, the delightful moment in Olivier's *Hamlet* when the King rises from his seat to address Laertes, clothed in a dark, bejewelled doublet and pale hose, as though he had forgotten his trousers when dressing for dinner. Shakespeare's gift to Hamlet of a flashing and meteoric wit was snipped from the script, so that what passed in the film for comic relief was largely

Hamlet's unforgivably vulgar horseplay with Osric: another sidelight on recent manifestations of the English Sense of Humour in our cinema.

The first three comedies of Ealing's cycle were all films of merit. *Whisky Galore* is one of the best post-war British films: it has freshness both in execution and in its approach to character, and it was composed with sufficient vinegar and human malice to leave one convinced of its truthfulness—it is, as all comedy should be, a rounded and complete view of human beings from a detached, superior point of view. *Passport to Pimlico* could have been equally good, but it sacrificed a comic enquiry into motives and personality to a farcical romp; the richness of the comedy of character implicit in the subject remained undeveloped; a satiric point of view emerged momentarily and disappeared again. It was carried through, not by wit or polish, but by a sometimes hysterical jollity. Possibly the third of the trio, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, with its verbal wit and the plot's concluding double twist, was the most ambitious: the hero's spoken narrative aimed at the dexterity of Wilde, and the dialogue was streaked with epigrams. But there was no consistent visual wit to match

Nothing to Laugh At



Regional humour: the comic Welsh. Meredith Edwards and Hugh Griffith in "*A Run for your Money*."



Upper-class comedy: A. E. Matthews, Marjorie Fielding, Cecil Parker in "*The Chiltern Hundreds*."

the verbal: the various blowings up, drownings and slaughters were handled with little more than pedestrian thoroughness, while they cried out for style and ingenuity. As for *A Run for your Money*, its general level of facetious "regional" humour, though concocted with more than usual skill, typifies the seamier side of English comedy—which is the occasion for this article.

The truly English comic tradition is not the tradition of Congreve, Sheridan, Wilde and Coward—which has actually reached the screen very seldom (in Asquith's *French Without Tears*, a film which after ten years is still outwardly and obviously inventive, and in Clive Brook's

delicious but almost forgotten *On Approval*). This is more nearly an Irish tradition, and it has been once again proved by the ersatz splendours of *Lady Windermere's Fan* that elegance and verbal flourish will not in themselves hold the screen as they hold the stage. Apart from the later, romantic comedy of Shakespeare, the English comic tradition is that of the funny man or woman, from the *Wife of Bath* to *Juliet's Nurse*, from *Bottom the Weaver* through the noisy creations of Jonson to the creatures of Dickens and then, to all intents and purposes, to a dead end: except in so far as all charwomen and most butlers in English films are funny *ex officio*, needing no divine grace



Funny Londoners: Stanley Holloway et al. in "*Passport to Pimlico*."



Comical lower classes: Stanley Holloway, Joyce Carey in "*Brief Encounter*."



Comedy of Manners

Left: Leslie Howard and Wendy Hiller in "Pygmalion" (1938), directed by Leslie Howard and Anthony Asquith.

Left, below: Clive Brook's "On Approval" (1945), with Roland Culver, O. B. Clarence and Beatrice Lillie.

Below: Coward's "Blithe Spirit" (1945), directed by David Lean. Kay Hammond, Margaret Rutherford (silhouetted), Rex Harrison.





Comedy of Character

Above: "Whisky Galore" (1949), from Compton Mackenzie's novel, directed by Alexander Mackendrick. Joan Greenwood.

Right: Carol Reed's northern regional comedy, "Penny Paradise" (1937). Betty Driver, Edmund Gwenn, Ethel Coleridge.



of wit and no personal eccentricity to make them so. The more completely industrial life irons out the bubukles and whelks of individuality, the more remote we get from the basic glories of the English comic spirit.

Social comedy, at which Irish dramatists so often display their wit, and from which the comedy of Shaw arises, is a specialised taste. When it comes as near as *French Without Tears* to drawing its characters from stock "character parts", the film can do it justice, but *Blithe Spirit* as a film had to become far more obvious in its methods than the original play, and the cinema's need for action, rather than any inborn lack of taste on the part of those concerned, turned Coward's amusing anti-climactic ending into a climax that was little more than crude. *Pygmalion*, in which comedy expressed a serious social argument and embraced a fascinating clash of personalities, achieved more—but even that choice masterpiece was given to the public with the recommendation that if they listened carefully they would hear its heroine use an unmistakable "bloody" during a party conversation.

The truth is that, not only does social comedy when transferred to the screen demand special graces of style both from director and players, but it also demands certain qualities in the audience—a nice sense of social values, an appreciation of the finer accents of ironic speech, a quick perception of manners. In the theatre, with its more specialised audience, only Coward can supply us with comedy in this tradition since Maugham went astray with the slick spiritualities of *Sheppey*. But its refinements are rarely appreciated by cinema audiences not, as yet, quick at verbal humour or drilled in the social usages from which such comedy arises.

The Americans have succeeded in developing two genuinely comic screen traditions. Their silent films amassed a rich hoard of slapstick, which at its best was not simply mechanical but depended on true comic personalities—Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy, and others. Then an upper-middle-class comedy started in the thirties, with *My Man Godfrey*, *The Awful Truth*, *Nothing Sacred*; and this is one of Hollywood's greatest gifts to the screen. (To-day, Preston Sturges manages individually to combine both traditions.) Nobody would pretend that intrinsic greatness belongs to the Fredric March-Myrna Loy episodes of *The Best Years of our Lives* or to *Mr. Blandings Builds his Dream House*, but at any rate they arose from basic facts of American character and social organisation.

In Britain, probably Will Hay provided our best efforts at slapstick comedy, but in comparison they are theatrical, too dependent on the music-hall origin of their jokes and lacking the freedom of the best American screen farces. As for comedy of character, I am told that *Quiet Weekend* was comedy of a high order; but again it comes from the theatre and its basic ingredients are as false as those of, say, *Mrs. Miniver*. We do not approach life in that way, our attitude is clumsier, less mannered and certainly less unselfish. Nor are all charwomen and other members of the so-called lower classes blessed with the comicality which these films give them; it is as though film writers and directors here are in pursuit of an average that reduces character to a few parlour tricks, which actors like A. E. Matthews can perform with such charming artistry that we are sometimes coaxed into unthinking enjoyment; we expect some day to see Jack Warner's and Kathleen

Harrison's parts reduced to formulæ that will fit any film for which these players are intended (with a slight reduction, in consequence, of production costs). The first impact of Huggettry in *Holiday Camp* showed that here were quirks and oddities of character worthy of exploration—but the film, of course, was less than half-baked, and made little attempt to pursue them. The serialised adventures of the Huggetts quickly palled, for the character lost its original streak of plebeian vulgarity, its conviction that there is but one unique Huggett; from the personal he has become the typical, tightly corsetted into the stale and appalling average. The same is broadly true of the comic types in *A Run for your Money*; and, looking back, it becomes clear that in an early modest Carol Reed film, *Penny Paradise*, a Lancastrian comedy, there was more feeling for character, more real humour, than in any of these later films—let alone the disastrous *The Cure For Love*. (That Reed has a marked comic gift was also shown by *A Girl Must Live* twelve years ago, a film rich in characterisation and the only British comedy to compare with Hollywood in pace and observation.)

There is, of course, Jeffrey Dell: *Don't Take it to Heart* had more moments of lunatic fancy than any other unsatisfactory film on record, and they were moments not of fantastic invention but fantastic observation. The film irritated because it left its proper field of enquiry—the decayed aristocracy and the greedy parvenu—in order to exploit an irrelevant ghost. *It's Hard to be Good* succeeded academically where its forerunner failed, because Dell knew where he stood and at what target (provincial politics) his wit was directed; unfortunately what reached the target was usually facetiousness. The result of both Dell's films has been the hope that the next will be better, the angle of moral and intellectual superiority, from which life looks so grotesquely funny, more consistently maintained. Not even the Americans have worked this particular mine; a guilt-complex operates, it seems, amongst American film-makers—they can be funny only about the upper middle class. If their films touch a lower social layer they are smeared with sentimentality, whimsical or plain, with crime, or with the uncertain movements of the American social conscience.

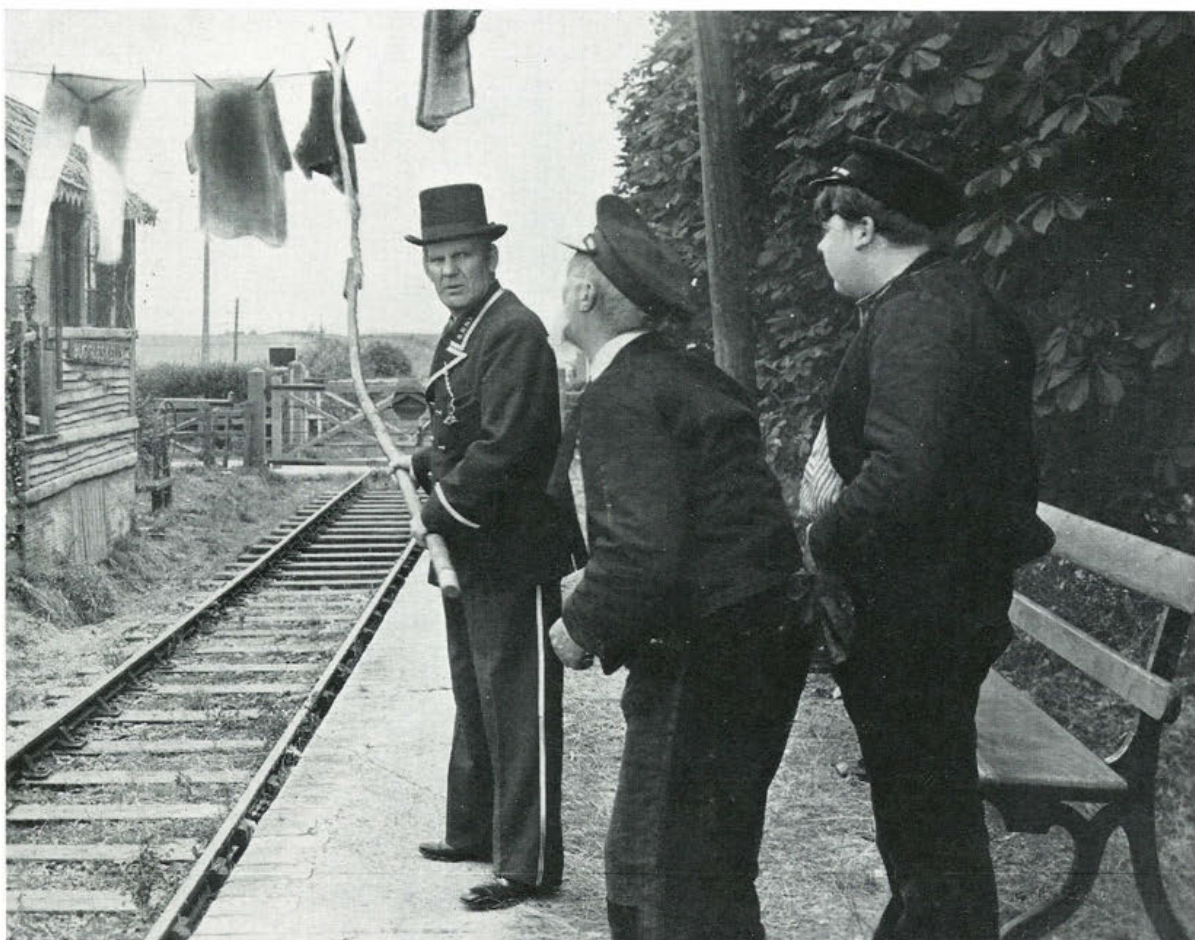
Within their social limits the American studios turn out comedy seldom of lasting value, but in its degree both charming and stimulating, rarely witty in dialogue, but neatly and sardonically observed. Occasionally, as with Sturges, or Mankiewicz's *Letter to Three Wives*, they touch on adult problems and treat them with varying measures of adult intelligence. But at the moment when the important remark might be made, they too often sheer off and return to adolescence. Nevertheless, they are the only gay fare on which we can regularly depend: an *On Approval* comes our way rarely.

"Even a joke should mean something", said the Red Queen. Comedy means either a fantastic or a superior view of normal things. Wit can exist in deadly earnest (*Kind Hearts and Coronets*) and, also, films of highly serious purport have contained scenes of rich, truly observed comedy. The unlimited space over which the camera ranges allows wide varieties of human oddity into the pattern of any film; and it should be a platitude to say that any view of a human situation which does not comprehend humour is, not incomplete (for a complete view is almost impossible) but biased.

The fact that comedy is so rapidly losing its sense of personality, that the humorous situation is moulded to the stereotyped "character", is a symptom of social ills not to be diagnosed in this essay. Comedy is primarily the art of an optimistic outlook. Truly to enjoy the custard-pie farce, one must be assured of the unique dignity of the human race; it is only to be expected that orang-outangs will bombard each other with any sticky messes that happen to be available, and the spectacle would raise hardly a whisp of laughter. To invite an audience to study the antics of their fellows, one must assume not only one's own potential superiority, but also that of the onlookers. Even the satirist, until his mind breaks like Swift's under the indignity of human folly, assumes that the lunacy of

the race is not incurable. We are justified in asking whether the eclipse of English comedy is the outcome of a view incapable of optimism.

It is not, certainly, due to a total absence of oddity in human action and utterance. Perhaps to-day these qualities are harder to find than before; if the charges of "extravagance" levelled at most of the great men of the cinema are true, if they never wait in bus queues or jostle among crowds in busy streets, they may easily miss the raw material of comedy and be compelled to fall back on those tricks which they were taught at mother's knee to understand as funny. As a woman walking along the road in front of me the other day said to her friend: "The worst of that shop is—if you don't get it when they've got it, you've had it".



A vintage Will Hay, "Oh Porter." Mr. Graham Moffat, Moore Marriott.

(Second Opinion continued from page 67)

Cannot someone show us life hanging there in time as complete a unity as the body appears in space? All the experiences of a lifetime seen not as one, but existing simultaneously, shaped in time?

I am ill-equipped as a film historian or critic, but it seems to me that the cinema, at any rate the English-speaking cinema, is becoming less and less inclined to conquer new lands. It neglects those potentialities—and high among them I should put its command of time—which distinguish it from the theatre, broadcasting and all other forms of

expression. How much too often it rehashes a novel or play.

I was glad to recapture 1917; I have been delighted by many tricks of speeding and slow motion; I was also moved, perhaps disproportionately, by *Farrebique*. I want much more than this. I want one day to leave a film with a sense of revelation, with a feeling that I have been privileged to look on this mysterious fourth dimension from a strange viewing place, that the boundaries of experience and comprehension have been majestically enlarged.

Films of the Month

ON THE TOWN

Gavin Lambert



A dance scene from "On The Town." Gene Kelly (centre).

THE MUSICAL FILM is an undisputedly American form of expression. At its best, it reflects a vigorous national tradition; at its worst, it vulgarises this tradition on an uninhibited scale. Because the musical has never really been taken seriously in this country, it exists only in a devitalised form, and the road from Gilbert and Sullivan to *Bless the Bride* is as straight as it is drearily genteel. Musical box tunes, chocolate box settings, comedy from "Punch" and sentiment from pressed roses—it needs a special taste and sensibility, such as the Viennese have achieved, to make anything from these.

The early American musicals, with their staccato tunes, rows of anonymous girls and evocative backstage atmosphere, were lively and original; this style, however, has declined with commercial repetition, and nowadays

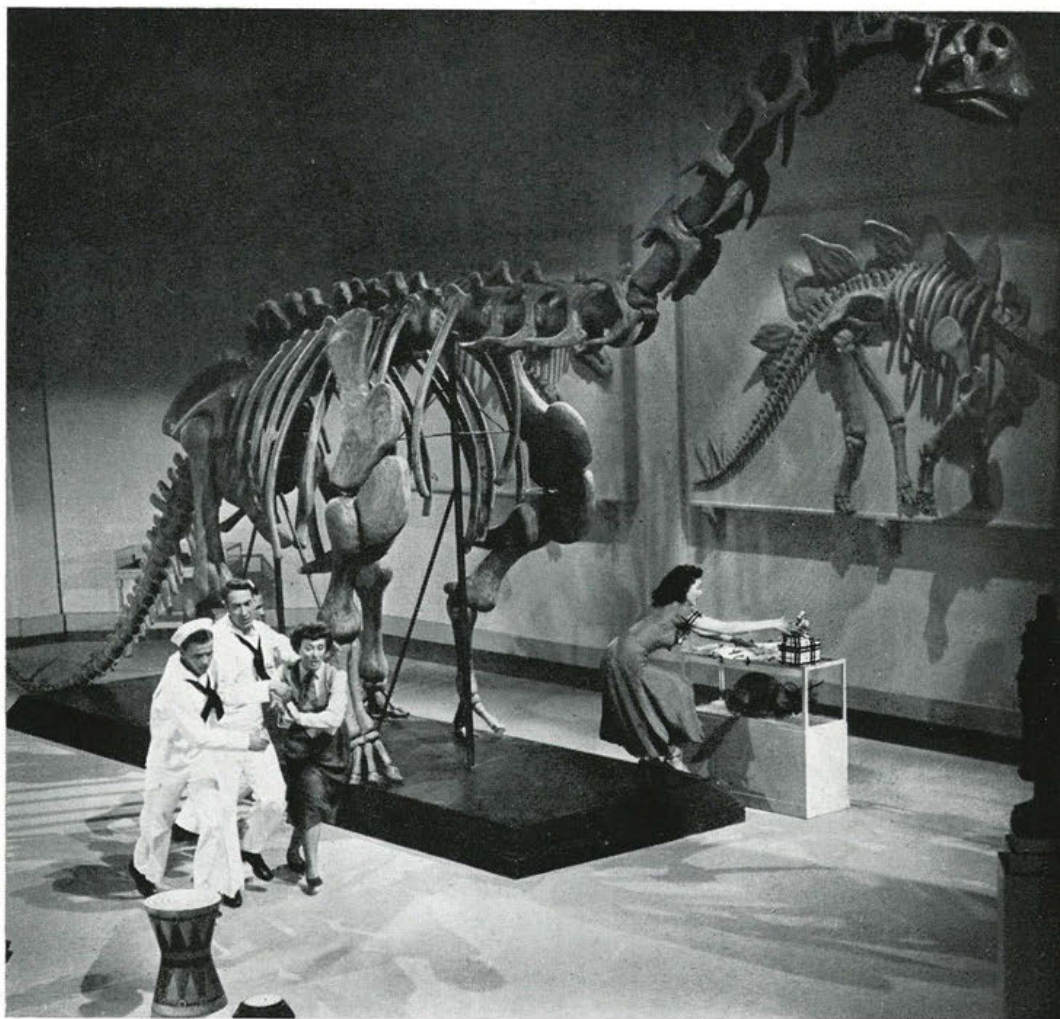
represents the nadir of the type. The *42nd Street* of yesterday has become the *Diamond Horseshoe* of to-day. Crude technicolor, tastelessly inflated spectacle and the nimble but monotonous talent of Betty Grable have stultified it. The discovery in the 'thirties of a new style was a minor artistic revolution. It began with the Astaire-Rogers musicals, which took a simple everyday story and, forsaking the technique of palatial stage numbers and twinkling backcloths, used naturalistic settings for their dances. No longer the redolence of greasepaint, the chorines manœuvred in abstract patterns, the Broadway nostalgias; but an emphasis on straightforward human values (developing into the period "family" musicals such as *Meet me in St. Louis* and *Summer Holiday*, the negro fable of *Cabin in the Sky*), on ordinary surroundings. The musical

came to terms with life, the folk tradition replaced the backstage myth.

On the Town is the latest musical in this style, and one of the most brilliant. Directed by Gene Kelly and a dance director, Stanley Donen, it tells of three sailors on 24 hours' leave in New York. It is their first visit to the city. The film opens with a harbour scene, attractive and subtle in tone: the docker walking along the quay, stretching his arms, yawning through a song, makes the opening reminiscent of *Oklahoma's* "Oh, what a beautiful mornin'". With the three sailors coming on shore, we are taken straight into a dance number—"New York, New York"—done on location and ingeniously put together with an abrupt, impressionistic technique. There is no attempt to build up a sustained dance sequence, but the camera ranges over various parts of the city, as the sailors explore it, jumping miles in a single shot. Quite soon the pattern of the story resolves itself: a girl for each sailor. One of them (Frank Sinatra) is to be chased by a voracious lady cab-driver (Betty Garrett) and finally netted. Another (Gene Kelly) falls in love with a Cinderella girl (Vera-Ellen). The third (Jules Munshin) wins the approval, in a natural science museum, of a girl (Ann Miller) studying anthropology in an unsuccessful attempt to divert her mind and emotions from actual men.

The material is slim enough, but the gaiety and liveliness of the principals, the beautifully executed numbers, dialogue not without wit or idiom, and the directors' fast, inventive technique easily sustain it. The museum scene provides an opportunity for a delicious number, "Prehistoric Man", in which Ann Miller wildly vamps a cave-man statue and a final *ensemble* brings about the collapse of a priceless dinosaur skeleton. *On the Town* is, in fact, almost unique in possessing not one weak number, nor one artificially inserted; they all arise quite naturally from situations. Apart from "New York, New York", the most virtuoso is probably the dramatic ballet towards the end, in which most of the day's events are recapitulated in mime and dance. Here Kelly's dancing is at its height.

Another pleasantly unconventional feature is the absence



The "Prehistoric Man" number in "On The Town." Frank Sinatra, Jules Munshin, Betty Garrett and Ann Miller (right).

of any star-principle. Although Kelly co-directs and plays one of the sailors, there is no attempt to highlight him. The six players perform as an equal team; and one must mention also Alice Pearce's caricature of a grotesque "blind date", and Florence Bates as a massive, alcoholic teacher of ballet.

Like *Oklahoma* and *Annie Get Your Gun* on the stage, *On the Town* reflects a peculiarly American genius for spontaneity and engaging high spirits. By the way it manages to burlesque a number of American myths and types; and it is interesting to note one rather cruel streak of characterisation that corresponds to *Oklahoma*. The stage musical's half-idiot yokel was actually a disagreeable touch, and in *On the Town* Alice Pearce's silly plain girl, on the verge of spinsterhood, is ruthlessly but not unpleasantly mocked.

Finally, one must not ignore the contributions to one of the most effortlessly gay films for some time, of the light and agreeable décors (by Cedric Gibbons and Jack Martin Smith), and the camerawork (Harold Rosson) which employs Technicolor with care and taste.

THE BLUE LAMP

Frank Enley



Violence in W.I.I. "The Blue Lamp."

THE CRITICAL AND FINANCIAL success of *The Blue Lamp* is a phenomenon surprising even in the cinema, where true success is not always widely recognised and where reputations can be made on the most dubious kind of achievement. *The Blue Lamp*, I believe, is a phenomenon of the second category: a peculiarly specious brand of mediocrity which, to put it mildly, is having a fine run for its money.

The case of *The Blue Lamp* is typical both of the British cinema and of the studio which produced it. The film is a middlebrow failure quite different, for example, from David Lean's *Madeleine*, that mountainous and hollow lump of prestige, or *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, which killed a brilliant and moving short story with ostentatious "art" effects. Dearden's film is ostensibly more modest, down to earth; influenced in its approach by the post-war American thrillers, its story is a simple one of two criminals traced, chased and finally captured by the police, it takes us out of the studio into Ladbrooke Grove and the Edgware Road,

in the studio its sets are authentic and sensible, and its "documentary" evidence—the everyday routine of Scotland Yard and of police stations—carefully compiled. As usual with Ealing pictures, good and bad, great pains have been taken to present a respectable surface.

Though the story has its tension, its acts of violence and its chase sequence, its backbone is "character". The characters come in two sorts: starred and cameo. The main ones are the two young criminals, the girl of one of them, and selected members of the police. The criminals are actually the most successful, since they are given fewer mannerisms in the writing and are played by actors (Dirk Bogarde and Patric Doonan) whose style and personalities are not prefabricated. The girl is a one-dimensional character that, though the script keeps her perpetually on the verge of hysterics, good playing might have made something of—but Peggy Evans' obvious inexperience with the technique of screen acting and the intricacies of

maintaining a cockney accent through tears and rage, do not give her conviction. Nor is she helped by the director's very relative interest in character.

Depicting the police force, *The Blue Lamp* relies mainly on players whose personalities are—through years of Huggetting or playing in previous Ealing pictures—largely tabloid. In the case of Jack Warner, both these disadvantages are present. Further, his wife is portrayed by Gladys Henson, and this ménage, recapitulated on the screen by Ealing since *The Captive Heart*, is now devoid of human reality. The emotional temperature of the writing and handling is artificially lowered to the demands of “understatement”—a device, when used sparingly and with genuine feeling, which can be very dramatic, but in *The Blue Lamp* has the effect of mechanical parody. Thus, when she hears of Warner's death, Gladys Henson is clutching some flowers, and says only: “I must put these in water. . . .” Before that, waiting to hear the result of his emergency operation, she accepts a cup of tea in the hospital corridor with the aside: “They're very kind, you know”. The idea that British people of a certain social order are invariably distracted by trivia (mainly domestic objects) when brought news of death or disaster, has persisted in British films ever since Joyce Carey commented on her husband's death in *In Which We Serve* by changing her apron round back to front. Direct, unforced grief or panic is permitted, it seems, only to the criminal or upper classes. Bogarde may break out in fear, his girl roar with pain or terror, but Henson only puts her flowers in water.



“*The Blue Lamp*.” Peggy Evans, Patric Doonan, Dirk Bogarde.

Members of the police force behave with unrelenting imperturbability. There is hardly any suggestion that they may carry out their work in various moods, that they might sometimes be bored, or angered, or excited. As a new recruit, Jimmy Hanley supplies his usual cockney joviality, and Meredith Edwards is brought in for a spot of regional humour. (Being Welsh, he organises the police choir.) Stiff and gentlemanly upper lips reign at Scotland Yard—one remembers particularly the public school Sergeant (Robert Flemyng) who, when confronted with a piece of incontrovertible evidence linking a robbery and a murder, asks his superior with boyish decorum: “Do you think there's anything in it, sir?”

The cameo characters are those whose connections with the police are transitory or eccentric—encounters on Hanley's night beat or importunates at the police station. With infallible type-casting we are given Dora Bryan as a noisy slut, Muriel Aked as a fussy old lady, Betty Ann Davies as an embittered sloven, John Salew as a seedy busybody: these and other players are used for written-up “cameo” scenes and reflect most sharply, perhaps, the general level of observation and perception in the film. This observation comes not from life, but from an established style of reportage. The well-known (and, alas, well-loved) mannerism replaces the gesture of authentic emotion, the type is substituted for the individual in the cause of being “representative”. Life in *The Blue Lamp*, in fact, stems from the same source as life in the



Our policemen, through Ealing eyes. Jack Warner (centre), Jimmy Hanley (right, centre). “*The Blue Lamp*.”

railway buffet of *Brief Encounter* or the Huggetts' living-room.

Technically, *The Blue Lamp* displays Basil Dearden's usual polish and competence. There is no warmth, no inner verisimilitude; the surface is impeccable and the centre dead. As a stylist, he is not unlike what Lean appears to have become. The characters are there to be effectively grouped and angled, he indulges in some orthodox melodramatic use of deep focus, he likes to startle with a few sudden cuts. (Sometimes, patience is rewarded: the scene of the cinema robbery is well put together.) But this is not enough for *The Blue Lamp* to be compared, as it has been, with *The Naked City*. The level of *The Naked City* is, I think, seldom above that of skilful and lively journalism, but its presentation is incomparably more resourceful, its locations extend over more varied territory. And the great advantage which American location-thrillers possess is that, though their characterisation may be basically no deeper than that of *The Blue Lamp*, containing more types than individuals, these types are presented vividly, naturally and without pretension. The conventional, in fact, is re-presented with vigour and enthusiasm. Hollywood has also a much greater reserve of good players from which to draw: most of the actors in *The Naked City* were unknown, and a comparison of Adelaide Klein (who played the murdered girl's mother) in her moment of grief, with Gladys Henson and her vase of flowers, shows the

advantage of unfamiliarity and a direct approach to the human situation. With no inanimate object on which to perform a distracting *tour de force*, the woman in *The Naked City* tells feelingly of what her daughter had meant to her. The difference here cannot be ascribed to national temperament: in Britain also it is not unheard of for women to weep at a time of bereavement—surely, indeed, this is the most likely reaction.

The Blue Lamp is popular because it follows in a tradition of popularity, the tradition of *In Which We Serve*, *The Captive Heart*, *The Way to the Stars*, *Passport to Pimlico* and others. These films are popular because they subscribe to certain myths; they appeal, I suspect, to a vanity in the national temperament. They are all conceived as tributes—to the navy, to p.o.w's, to the air force, to Londoners and to policemen. They have in common the notion that all Britishers are "brave"—that is, they face tragedy without betraying strong emotion. But what war film ever showed bravery after fear? *Sang-froid* unites all classes, but apart from this there is a sharp division. The upper classes are usually dignified in their everyday lives, while the lower classes are eccentric (vocabulary, costume, ideas of entertainment) and therefore comical. The chief emotional overtone of all this, it seems to me, is complacency: and complacency is the enemy of good art—of truthful perception and valid sympathy.



Dearden on location.

EDITING

Karel Reisz

"TECHNICALLY, the picture is free from the nervous cutting for mechanical pace so holy in Hollywood, and close-ups do not pop in to fill dramatic vacuums. There is no excess of moving shots having the aesthetic value of vertigo. The style of shooting is round, built about the people in relation to one another, held in the shot to let the story come through". This is how Abraham Polonsky (scriptwriter of *Body and Soul*, director of *Force of Evil*) has described Wyler's technique in *The Best Years of our Lives*. It is a scriptwriter's comment, which should probably be read as an indictment of "dramatic vacuums" rather than of the use of close-ups of such. But the hint is there: Polonsky in effect implies that if the story is good enough, if the relationships between characters are roundly portrayed, then mechanical pace and the emphasis given by close shots are not needed; they would be pepping up something which is quite strong enough in itself.

Curiously enough, we have recently had the opportunity to consider this attitude to editing in a most surprising context. *Bicycle Thieves* is as unlike *The Best Years of our Lives* as two films could be, but Polonsky's comment can be made to apply to both films almost equally well.

In *Bicycle Thieves*, de Sica shows himself to be a master of the use of the long shot and only very rarely takes his camera close to the actors. The story tells of the experiences of two people (father and son act almost as a single unit: "the image of these two beings . . . I always saw together", de Sica has written) and of life in the city of Rome. Neither of these themes primarily suggests close shots. The relationship between father and son is of course beautifully conveyed in the acting, but that is not all. De Sica, with a mastery of dramatic composition which must make a painter envy the film-maker's ability to portray movement, places his two characters within the picture frame in a most subtly evocative manner. Whether the father and son are casually walking side by side, or the boy is trotting along behind, there is always a good reason for seeing them as we see them. In the passage where the father momentarily loses his temper and strikes the boy to give vent to his own anger and frustration, we are, it is true, immediately shown a close shot of the boy bursting into tears. A lesser director might have left it at that. Here, however, we are given a deeper insight into the boy's reaction: in the next shot, the boy is seen walking sulkily—almost proudly—in a wide arc away from his father. The close shot is simply used to make us think that the boy is still by his father's side, but the point is made in the long shot which follows—by the way the two actors are disposed in the frame. It comes as a sudden revelation: we now see that the boy is indeed hurt by his father's momentary cruelty, but we feel that his pain is tinged with a certain wisdom and understanding, expressed in the illogical, poignant manner of a child.

This passage constitutes an almost exact antithesis of normal editing procedure. Ever since Griffith first started to use close shots of actors, long shots have been used to establish the situation, and close shots to convey the emotion. Here, the close shot establishes the situation—

deliberately in a false way, to make us think the boy is still by his father's side—and the long shot suddenly discloses a deeper insight. I don't want to lay too much stress on the mechanics of this single passage, or to suggest that it exemplifies de Sica's *only* trick, but it does seem to me to be typical of his restrained editing style.

In Fred Zinneman's *The Search* a similar technique is used, though perhaps less successfully, because the director cannot quite compensate for the rather artificial meanderings and coincidences of the script. Here again the moments of greatest stress are shown in the distance. When the G.I. (Montgomery Clift) is telling the little boy (Ivan Jandl) that his mother has died, they are both sitting with their backs to the camera, and the scene is played in this static set-up throughout. The temptation to cut to a close-up must have been pretty strong, but Zinneman resisted it; not till some time after the climax do we get a close shot of the boy. Similarly, in the final scene in which the boy is reunited with his mother, the whole drama is enacted in long shot. The boy is walking in a column of children, and his mother, who is watching them, fails at first to notice him. Then she registers the serious equivalent of a comedian's "double take" and her son pushes his way through the oncoming crowd of children and runs into her arms. That is all: no close-ups, no "acting". It is the way the scene is "managed" which makes it so deeply moving.

It would be absurd to demand that all films should henceforth be made in the manner described above. Clearly the Italian style of acting ("a natural *expressivo*", Philip Hope-Wallace has called it) is peculiarly suited to de Sica's long-shot style of editing. Rossellini used similar methods in *Paisa*, notably in the episode of the negro and the boy. But if an English director were to try a similar effect, the result would almost certainly be disastrous—which is not a criticism of English acting, merely a recognition of differences in style. In English films, the actors understate and the camera stresses; in *Bicycle Thieves* the reverse happens. The spectator who is used to seeing close-ups "popping in to fill the dramatic vacuums" immediately recognises in de Sica's film a dramatic restraint which lends it a deeper, more authentic power.

Many writers have complained that the basic methods of film construction—of editing—were developed in the days of the silent film and have not really changed up to the present day. Mechanical pace, that is to say acceleration of cutting tempo towards the climax, parallel editing, and the constant cutting to reaction shots, is to-day employed much in the same way as in Griffith's films. Close shots are used as Griffith used them—for emphasis and emotion. This method has produced wonderful films, and will no doubt continue to do so; I am not implying an adverse criticism of it. But it does seem that de Sica has to some extent broken away from the tradition, without—as others have done—laying himself open to the charge of being theatrical. He is simply not interested in mechanical pace, and prefers to get his effects through an eloquent composition of his long shots rather than isolating his characters by taking his camera near them. How far this restrained editing style will be successful with a different *kind* of subject, we shall perhaps see when de Sica makes his first film in Hollywood later this year. (This will be for Stanley Kramer, producer of *Champion* and *Home of the Brave*, and the subject—according to reports—a version of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.) Certainly, in *Bicycle Thieves*, the style has produced a masterpiece.

SCRIPTING

J. H. Kahan

IN THE FIRST of a series of articles which will discuss current films from the point of view of their screenplays, I should like to make some general points. Criticism of screenplays should not be concerned with the usual hotch-potch of sketchily written action scenes interlarded with some unspeakable dialogue, pepped up by "additional" dialogue plus some "additional" scenes by XYZ, which has become the usual formula of the screenplays we see, week in, week out. Credits for three to eight authors does not improve the general quality of such films, although the screenplay is and always will be the basis of any film, the worst and the best.

For hundreds of years mankind has accepted various kinds of art: architecture, sculpture, painting, drama, music, and so on. Every one of these is a specific medium in itself, and should not be mixed up with another. In each one we find a different and distinguishing essence of its own. People continue to recognise masterpieces of art hundreds of years after they have been originated; even less educated people are affected by the eternal beauty of a Greek sculpture or by the magnitude of a Beethoven symphony, without necessarily knowing the reasons for their reactions.

Films are a new medium of art, without being recognised as such in many cases. But whether certain people like it or not, they belong to the arts, although those who have industrialised films may not accept this. An art form should preserve its individuality, but we find in the film industry a partiality towards existing literature, plays and novels. It is understandable that it is not an easy undertaking to have a few creative screenwriters always at hand who are able to originate stories for this particular medium. Such writers must not only be creative, but at the same time specially gifted, knowing the *How* of screenwriting, and possessing the flair which makes for a real and genuine film.

Taking for granted the descriptive power of a novelist, his style, his rhythmic device of telling his story, will make it a good novel or a weak one. His dialogue is read, heard by the reader with his inner ear, not heard aloud. Therefore his dialogue can sometimes be artificial, or twisted to serve a particular literary purpose. A stage play brings all its characters together on the stage, and there they thrash out their problem in front of the audience. Much more strongly than in the novel, the rhythmic device gains here in importance, misfiring if not properly sustained in the last act or supporting the dramatic climax of the whole play. Where the novelist can use up pages and pages describing people and their surroundings, the playwright can only squeeze in a few lines of stage directions. His imaginative power is concentrated on the dialogue, which has to be brought alive by the actors. Nevertheless, even on the stage a kind of dialogue which would never be used in actual life can pass and succeed.

Film, being a visual art, seeing through the descriptive eye of the camera much more quickly than dialogue can elucidate, is partially helped by dialogue, but dialogue is not the basis of its narrative. The story-teller of the cinema can follow his characters around with the aid of the camera, can mix with people and even become one of them, participating in events instead of being a fixed member of the audience. While we need a few lines of cross-dialogue on the stage to explain the character of a person who will later enter the drama, the camera can prepare for this with a few glimpses, rhythmically arranged and developed.

When a screenwriter, as he is so often required to do, drafts so-called Master Scenes (which in the sense of film art are not masterly at all, since they are not conceived in sequences of visuals but more like the *précis* of scenes in a novel) it is like a composer having jotted down notes without their rhythmical meanings which finally create the melody. A "film" scene sketched out like this is open to any sort of interpretation by director or cameraman. A true filmwriter must know the technical necessities of a detailed script; he has to feel in bits and pieces the inner movement of the scenes, then find their best arrangement. Only then will a whole scene, and other scenes, become part of a properly conceived film. The filmwriter has to identify himself with the eye of the camera, and must realise intuitively the power of editing. If he cannot do this (and there are not many, of course, who can) he must at least provide the director with material that can be finally shaped, with potentials that are clearly of the cinema and not with a treatment so ill-defined in its narrative resources that any competent artisan might turn it into play, novel or film according to his trade.

A special technique, also, is required for the writing of dialogue. Spoken words, for example, may need to overlap from a medium shot to a close up, and eventually into a long shot, in order to match the visual presentation of the whole scene. The composition of the dialogue will have to take this into account while still preserving naturalism. But problems of this refinement are almost unknown to writers in this country. Here two or more dialogue writers are invited to contribute some "additional" dialogue because the dialogue in the first draft is simply not good enough; these dialogue masters will invent a few (what they believe to be) good lines or scenes, disregarding the possibility that they may not fit properly into the original script. In other cases the director will be given a "Master Script" because he likes to work in that way (any producer permitting this does not know his job), and it will depend day by day on how the director feels whether the film he is going to make will follow out its original conception. And then comes the third case, when a well known director murders his own pioneering knowledge of the essentials of film-making, by eliminating all cuts and shooting continuous scenes under the pretence of giving actors a better acting chance, having forgotten that the part of the actor in films is entirely different from his stage work.

Films as a special medium of art have their laws, by which screenwriters must abide; if they do not, not all the "prestige" production in the world can save the result. The director is not the only person who has to grasp the basic and essential properties of film-making.

THE VISUAL IMPACT

J. Isaacs



One of Andreyev's sets for Pabst's "*Dreigroschenoper*."

IT IS NOT putting the clock back to affirm that all good films are essentially silent films. Unless a film is visually satisfactory, no amount of camouflage in dialogue or music can rescue it. But excessive or arty visual quality can kill just as much as deficiency, as we can see in the fundamental failure of Dreyer's collection of stills in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, or the visual inadequacies of most documentary films. These are the two extremes—predetermination and selection. We have to do with the artist, whether contained within the director or camera-man, or more or less detached in the form of the art director.

What is the difference between film design and stage design? Simply, that stage design is primarily the work of a painter, it is a stage *picture*, and film design is primarily the work of the architect. On the stage the actors move against a background. On the screen the actors move in and out of the architectural setting. The French Exhibitions at Burlington House and the British Museum Print Room at the moment provide a superb object-lesson. All directors, not merely art directors, should study the fresh impressionistic drawings of Claude and the carefully contrived studio-pictures he makes out of them, with the acting-space precisely delimited in a three-dimensional world. If any-

thing more advanced is needed, there is the intellectual treatment of Poussin. In the Wallace Collection there is a remarkable *Dance to the Music of Time* which has a quality very rarely found in films—visual music. It is this visual music, this suspended grave lilt, which gives distinction to Flaherty's *Louisiana Story*, and is completely absent in *Bicycle Thieves*, and, for that matter, in most recent Italian films. Space, designed space, is the basic condition of cinema, inducing an empathic solidity from the two-dimensional surface.

The teaching of Claude and Poussin is that art direction is precision-work. How much predetermination may be permitted depends of course on the nature of the film, the emotional level at which it is being contrived, and the demands to be made on the audience. If the story is all-important, if the acting-vehicles are paramount, something must suffer, though in the past that was not always considered necessary. More than twenty years ago it was possible to combine all factors in Feyder's *Thérèse Raquin*, where Andreyev's unobtrusive settings moved in unison with Zola's powerful story and a superb acting group. On a smaller scale recently, Raymond Druard's period-witty and discreet settings for *Gigi* neither overwhelmed

nor underweighed the slight story and the measured acting. From the visual point of view this is one of the happiest of recent successes, and I should include in the art direction the "mask" of Jean Tissier as the *roné*, going back to the visual tradition of Molière with some hint of the *Commedia dell'arte*. One of the least happy of recent efforts is *The Forsyte Saga*. Here it is not sufficient to judge it as just another film. As it attempts to cash in on the prestige of Galsworthy's story, it must be treated as a *Forsyte* film with Galsworthy setting the pace. Its very glossiness was damaging, its anachronisms obtrusive. Galsworthy specified a frock-coat world and William Morris wallpapers, instead of the pretty but inwardly disturbing white backgrounds for Soames's paintings. Here, if anywhere, was needed a visual floating music for Irene, deliberately created by Galsworthy as the disturbing spirit of beauty. Only one set, a bitterly nostalgic bookshop setting, redeemed the film visually. On the other hand, in the *Dreigroschenoper*, recently revived at the London Film Club, anachronism was of the very essence of the director's intention, with its underplay of the *Beggar's Opera*. Gustave Doré's London docksides, the macabre Hogarthian-Dickensian masks of poverty, and Andreyev's Piranesi-like solidities of light and shadow wear very well after twenty years.

These are all highly contrived effects, as predetermined as Cocteau's *Belle et la Bête* or the painted shadows of *Caligari* and *The Student of Prague*, or even the opening sequence of *Oliver Twist*. At the other extreme is *Scrapbook for 1933*, where some attempt has been made to control the haphazardness of the newsreel world. In the last days of the old Film Society we were going to do a Retrospect of the Year in newsreels. The idea was to perpetuate some of those sudden flashes of beauty which are obtained by accident and retained by design, to elicit a pattern of history from the scattered happenings of the year, and perhaps to inject a little pictorial wit of juxtaposition as an overall binding quality, but the Trade withheld its blessing and its permission. *Scrapbook for 1933* seemed to fall between all possible stools. The opening lumber-room was pure *kitsch*, leading to the concluding visual cliché of the stage-scene receding to an old still photograph, the juxtapositions were facile, the visual humour painful, and apart

from one shot of Indian reapers and two glorious punctuation-marks of blank screen, there was little visual warmth. It was an opportunity wasted, for the idea is excellent, and something might have been learnt from Ruttmann's *Berlin* or even from the excesses of Dziga Vertov's manipulation of newsreel material. There is room for a new category—"Documentary Entertainment", and neither the entertainment nor the Interpretation of History need necessarily be Marxian.

My regretful conclusion, after seeing new films and revivals during the post-war years, is that although photography has improved in slickness and glossiness, although the visual *texture* seems infinitely more controllable than before, what is being said visually through and by means of this texture has less originality and less kick. In other words, art direction has become academic. To compare the drawings by Herth and Roerig for Ufa's *Faust* in 1926 which Edward Carrick reproduces in his valuable and suggestive book, with John Bryan's equally effective sketches for the wordless opening sequence in *Oliver Twist* is to be convinced that this side of the cinema has been merely marking time. We can be thankful that the lessons have been noted, if not always learnt. The danger, of course, is of retrogression, but so long as the silent nature of cinema is borne in mind, the danger can be warded off.

The chief snag of the art director, and of the general director, it must be conceded, is always the actor. As a positive factor he has his rights, even though he tends to usurp them, but as a factor in visual design he is the trickiest of material. When he is a static object in a static design he is invaluable. The ominous groupings of strikers in a factory yard, or outside the gates, in the films of Pudovkin and others have never been surpassed for emotional visual effect, and after all the visual is only a stage in the creation of the emotional. It is when the actor begins to move that he becomes dangerous. When he begins to speak, he is, I think, removed from this present field of discussion. The relation between static settings and moving objects, whether actors, or, as in Mamoulian's recently revived *City Streets* of 1931, motor-cars amid mountain curves, is a theme for another article.



A comparison: design by Herth and Roerig for Murnau's "Faust" in 1926 (from "Designing for Films," *The Studio*), and one of John Bryan's sketches for Lean's "Oliver Twist" in 1948 (from "Art and Design in British Films," Dennis Dobson).

REVALUATIONS—I

Roger Manvell

The purpose of this series of reviews is to look again at films which have come to be regarded as "classics" in the history of the cinema. Although what matters to us here is their intrinsic value as motion pictures, their importance historically speaking will also be kept in mind. In addition we shall give a summary of some past critical opinion on the film.

We hope this series of revaluations will be of use to film societies faced with the problem of preparing programme notes for their audiences and that it will also be of interest to all readers who like old as well as new films.



"Siegfried." The dragon.

SIEGFRIED 1922-1924

Directed by Fritz Lang for Decla-Bioscop and UFA. Scenario by Thea von Harbou. Photographed by Karl Hoffman and Gunther Rittau. Designed by Otto Hunte, Erich Kettlehut and Karl Vollbrecht.

With Paul Richter as Siegfried, Margarete Schoen as Kriemhild, Hans von Schlettow as Hagen, Hanna Ralph as Brunhild.

Siegfried, first part of *The Nibelungen*, was released in 1924 and was followed by *Kriemhild's Revenge* in the same year. It was made in the middle period of the German post-war silent cinema. Before it came *Madame Dubarry*, *Caligari* and *The Golem* in Germany, as well as Lang's own films *Destiny* (1921) and *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922). The work of the Russians was not yet known in Germany: *Potemkin* (1925) was not to be shown in Berlin until 1926. *Siegfried*, therefore, comes early in the fuller development of the silent film, except, of course, for Griffith's films which had naturally not been shown in Germany until after the War.

Dejected after her defeat and her heavy material

sufferings, Germany tended to salve her deeply wounded pride by reviving the more imposing of her national legends. The propaganda value of *Siegfried* for German audiences was emphasised a few years after by Huntley Carter in "The New Spirit in the Cinema" (1930), and later, of course, by Siegfried Kracauer in "From Caligari to Hitler" (1947). Kracauer refers to Lang's own objective when he writes: "According to him *Nibelungen* had quite another mission: to offer something strictly national, something that, like the Lady of the Nibelungs itself, might be considered a true manifestation of the German mind. In short, Lang defined this film as a national document fit to



Spectacle in "Siegfried." Top: architecture. Middle: the disembarkation of Brunhild. Below: Siegfried in the forest glade.

publicise German culture all over the world. His whole statement somewhat anticipated the Goebbels propaganda". Kracauer also quotes Thea von Harbou, Lang's wife at the time of the making of *Siegfried*, and his scenarist: she said the film was designed to stress "the inexorability with which the first guilt entails the last atonement".

Georges Sadoul in his "Histoire de l'art—Le Cinéma" says the film foreshadows the Nazi pomp of Nuremberg and the UFA-like architecture and pageantry of the Third Reich, and Kracauer draws a parallel between Hagen and "a well-known type of Nazi leader".

Lang is Viennese by birth and possesses Jewish blood. He studied architecture and painting. When he began film-making the values of the German artistic world were in a state of chaos. Lotte Eisner comments on the German intellectuals at the time *Siegfried* was made: "Disillusioned, the German intellectuals who would not and could not resign themselves to hard, plain reality, clung to their old reputation as a 'people of poets and thinkers', and endeavoured to take refuge in a sort of subconscious world full of anguish, unrest, and a vague remorse, obsessed by the memory of a glorious past." (*Penguin Film Review* 6.)

All criticism of Lang's earlier films stresses the architectural quality of their sets. For *Siegfried* Lang and his designers went back to the kind of stage setting Reinhardt had used before the War. *Siegfried*, therefore, is retrogressive as far as design is concerned, compared, for example, with the earlier expressionist film *Caligari*. Lang's artistic sense is very strictly architectural, and depends on the play of light on masses: this was emphasised by Arnheim in "Film" (1930), and is taken further by Lotte Eisner in the study of Lang previously quoted. She writes: "Critics have sometimes blamed Lang for constructing his vast-scale exteriors in the studio or on the studio lot with a huge amount of plaster, stucco, and canvas. Yet the artificial forest of *Siegfried* breathes life; sunbeams weave across the dense trees and a radiant haze floats between their heavy trunks. A painting by the Swiss artist, Arnold Böcklin, inspired this vision like other scenes of the *Nibelungen Saga*, and also the Island of Death in *Destiny*. If here paintings come to life on the screen, we could, vice versa, halt the *Nibelungen* film any moment and find ourselves in front of a well-balanced, self-contained, and static picture".

Paul Rotha, when he was an art-student recently turned film-critic, wrote at length about *Destiny* and *Siegfried* in "The Film Till Now" (1930) as "supreme examples of the German art film. They were entirely studio-made, and in each the decorative value of the architecture was the binding force of the realisation. They were fantastic in that they were concepts of the imagination; they were decorative in that they employed a series of visual images, designed in black and white and intervening tones of grey, in a two-dimensional pattern. For sheer pictorial beauty of structural architecture, *Siegfried* has seldom been equalled".

Looking at *Siegfried* in 1950, a quarter of a century after it was made, one is aware of the outstandingly good and bad elements in it after as little as twenty minutes' screening. (The whole film lasts about two hours when it is projected at proper speed for silent films.) The so-called "expressionist" style in German silent cinema, which encouraged directors and designers to stylise both décor and acting, rapidly passed out of fashion. *Siegfried* seems farther away from present day film-making than the silent

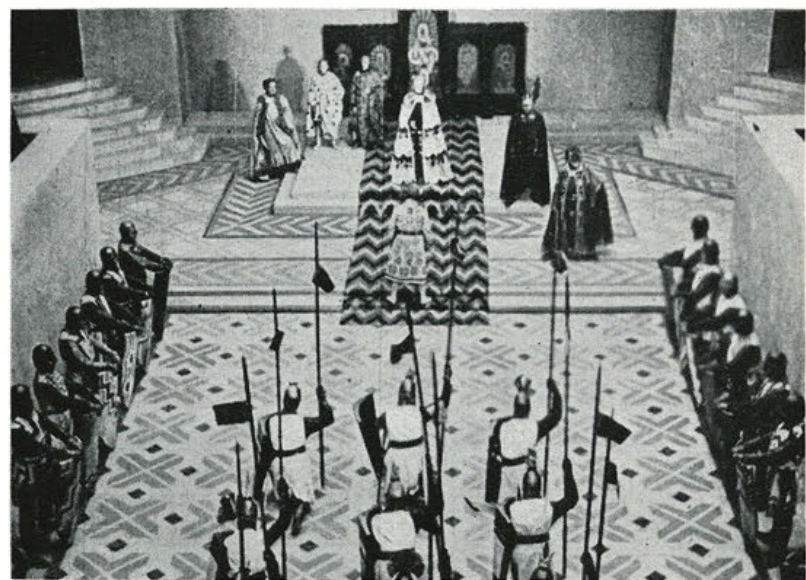
films of Griffith or Eisenstein because of this excessive stylisation.

First of all the action of Lang's film is taken at a pace which is much too slow for the modern viewer, so that in almost every shot one accepts the implications of the scene long before the actors complete it. Every emotion is registered with emphatic gestures and facial expression in the manner common to the films of the period, except in the work of a few of the more exceptional players in Griffith's films. The characters are, of course, larger and psychologically simpler than life in their legendary setting, so that some heroic magnification is correct, but it is interesting to see among the grotesque figures how Georg John succeeds as Alberic, King of the Dwarfs, but fails in his other part of Mime, the blacksmith who appears at the opening of the film; Mime appears simply ludicrous, not grotesque. Richter, his hair long and Wagnerian, is adequate as Siegfried, a little like Douglas Fairbanks in his athletic mime, but with no trace of Fairbanks' humour. Both the women are poor: Kriemhild, Siegfried's wife, with her long plaits and upward glances, is absolutely colourless, whereas Brunhild, the German Amazon queen, over-acts with strenuous fierceness. On the other hand, the weak King of the Burgundians and his evil Councillor, Hagen (macabre and splendid in his black robes and towering winged helmet) are both excellent.

Human characterisation, however, was not Lang's main consideration. He wanted to create a legendary atmosphere, and to create it by pictorial means. It was more important for him that Kriemhild should sit a still and statuesque figure in the archway of a window than that she should show the nervous impulses of a woman waiting for a likely prince. Siegfried and his warrior kings observe strict formation in the Burgundian court and processions and church services alike are seen to be perfect in their pictorial symmetry. If this exact symmetry oppresses you, then the architecture of *Siegfried* with its vast, spacious walls, its balance of curved masses with angular masses, its geometrically patterned floors and its long flights of steps will soon become a visual bore. But if you like symmetry, then you will find (for a time, at least) a nobility and grandeur in these palaces and courts, and in the costumes with their equally symmetrical designs from the Reinhardt theatre.

The most impressive and beautiful scenes in the film are those in the forests, the misty glades and the caverns through which Siegfried has to travel before he reaches the Kingdom of Burgundy. After many viewings spread over nearly twenty years I still find the sequence of Siegfried's approach to the dragon through the high trees one of the most beautiful in the silent cinema, and the dragon himself (controlled by a team of men inside his framework) the most impressive of all the screen's giant monsters. The descent into the cave holding the Rhine treasure hoard is a wonderful studio spectacle, and the shot of the slowly petrifying dwarfs is completely convincing. One's memory of this long film returns in the end to these scenes, or to those of the ride of Siegfried on his horse led by Alberic through the mists, and his death at the end of the film in the little artificial glade.

The rest of the film is best projected at sound speed. This substantially quickens the intolerably slow pace of the action in the midst of architectural sets which appear increasingly cold and dead as the film develops.



"Siegfried." Top and middle: Kriemhild and Siegfried—silent German acting. Below: an interior—monotony of rigid grouping.

THE STATURE OF ROSSELLINI

Simon Harcourt-Smith

AT UNEXPECTED corners of London, vast posters announce as I write the imminent arrival of *Stromboli*: Bergman's and Rossellini's names couple in a gigantic embrace: the Academy cinema is showing the long awaited *Miracolo*. Not even in the heyday of René Clair did a film director know such fame. The time therefore has perhaps arrived to consider Rossellini's true value as an artist.

The Anglo-Saxon who knows and loves Italy is sometimes surprised, repelled even, by the grace with which the average Italian seems to have sloughed off the memory of the war, and all burden of guilt. The German with his Northern sense of guilt ceaselessly argues his innocence, but for your average Italian the war is just another piece of gossip to enrich a pleasant conversation stupidly interrupted in 1940. You've heard what befell Christina? Her Mario daren't come back to Italy, which couldn't suit her better. . . . And poor Giulia! She's asked nowhere these days because of that party she gave for Kesselring. . . . You'd never have believed it of Marcellino, would you? Such a feather-headed boy to die so bravely! The Germans just couldn't make him talk. . . . Tragic momentous events dwindle to the size of last season's scandal.

But there is one domain where the Italians turn the tables on us, where we seem the fibbety-jibs and they the noble mourners short of tears—I mean the cinema. The war is commonly proclaimed as having been at once the opportunity and the inspiration of British films; the ebbing of their vitality so soon after hostilities ended, would at least suggest an inspiration on the shallow side; and the friendliest re-examination of our wartime successes confirms this suspicion. In *Which We Serve*, *San Demetrio*, *The Way Ahead*, *Next of Kin*, *This Happy Breed*—all envisage war in terms of the heroics we find in a boys' paper or on the recruiting poster. Some of the blame for this vacuousness must of course be fixed upon the Government departments who closely supervised these films; but any latent sense of war's futility, any real maturity of attitude would have seeped through the censorship; Danny Kaye's caricature in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, of Michael Redgrave's Wing-Commander from *The Way to the Stars*, remains a criticism of the irreality of British war-films which is quite unanswerable. Never, at any time, during or since the war, have our directors attempted to study the pressure of our age upon unheroic credible people. The visual possibilities of bomb-sites, the inconvenience of a whisky shortage? Yes. But never a protest against the futility and degradation of war; never a film honestly to face our predicament, to become our conscience.

This evasion of reality, castrating even the best of our films, accounts for much of the Italian cinema's prestige at

the present time, and for the authority of directors like Rossellini and de Sica. Here is the atonement for the light-hearted chatter of Roman drawing-rooms. Their films and those of Lattuada utter, in a voice unheard elsewhere, the cry of a defeated, despairing humanity. Above all, they put us to shame.

His puritanism, his studied incoherence, his achievement of pathos by methods related rather to Picasso's war paintings than to the ordinary technique of cinema, have made it difficult to see Rossellini's achievement easily, let alone assess it. There are certain artists—Van Gogh, Seurat, Matisse come to mind—who floor criticism so swiftly by their technical innovations, that few stop to bother about their value as creative artists. I am sometimes inclined to wonder whether Rossellini did not work the same sort of effect upon us with *Open City*. Ever since the time of Paolo Uccello the Italians have been masters of illusion. Rossellini's manner is commonly described as "realistic"—distant cousin of the British documentary technique, but needing no tweeds, no pipe, no public bar to assert its virility. Nowhere, however, does the old Latin tag—*ars est celare artem*—attain a more harnessing truth than in Italy. There, nothing is quite what it seems; nowhere else, save in China, does the quickness of the hand more pleasurably deceive the eye. It is therefore at least possible that Rossellini's "realism" may not be merely the result of a genius taking a camera into the streets, but of a calculation at least as deep as anything in *The Third Man*.

There are grounds for believing that Mussolini brought to birth a school of documentary directors who specialised in making newsreels of triumphs not yet achieved, and which in many cases were never achieved. The capture of Madrid by those very Italian legionaries who came to grief at Guadalajara, the victorious entry into Cairo—somewhere, I am told, there still exist carefully composed newsreels of these mythical victories. While I do not know how closely Rossellini was connected with this school of official illusion, I suspect in these fake newsreels one might find clues to the style which, for all its roughness, emerges already as mature in *Open City*. It would also be interesting to examine the picture which Rossellini, in collaboration with Vittorio Mussolini, worked on some thirteen years ago, glorifying the Italian campaign in Abyssinia.

Of his post-war output, we have seen in this country three full-length pictures—*Open City*, *Pausa*, and *Germany, Year Zero*, together with *The Miracle*, a half-length piece, to which the pendant, Rossellini's version of Cocteau's trumpery and unfilmic *La Voix Humaine*, we await with rising apprehension. The three full-length pictures are all



Aspects of Rossellini. Above, "the flooded Po at the beginning of the last grim sequence of *Paisà*." Left, below: Magnani as the duped peasant in *The Miracle*. Right: a reminder of "the human heart's darkness" in *Open City* (Maria Michi and Giovanna Galletti).



concerned with war or its consequences. Into this category too must presumably come *Stromboli*, turning as it does about the fate of a Displaced Person (played by Bergman). Their main situations are of transient importance in time. *The Miracle* and *La Voix Humaine* on the other hand take life from a play of the emotions peculiar to no particular century: they can be fixed in date only by the invention of the telephone or the cut of the fake St. Joseph's plus-fours.

Let us, then, examine *Open City*, *Paisa* and *Germany, Year Zero*, to begin with. These three momentous films share certain qualities and defects in common: indignation against war, expressed by an affectation of "deadpan" impartiality: an extraordinary capacity for investing the simplest image with a nobility that never becomes rhetorical: an intense insistence upon our modern predicament, such as is almost entirely lacking from even the most adult films of the Anglo-Saxon world: passages of poetry which, though they may suggest the fitful glare of a sullen fire, never seem to lose their magic, however often we see them. In this last connexion I would cite as examples the children at the fence during Fabrizio's execution in *Open City*; the wind moaning down the flooded Po at the beginning of the last grim sequence of *Paisa*; Hitler's voice booming from a gramophone record in the gutted shell of the Reichskanzlei (*Germany, Year Zero*)—this, incidentally, seems to me a moment when the cinema reaches and perhaps surpasses the dreamlike horror of Chirico's earlier paintings.

Against these substantial virtues must be set a series of defects, most of which seem to spring either from Rossellini's defiant renunciation of cliché, or from his affectation of working without a properly prepared script. Continuity is thrown to the winds: there is no proper narrative, or at least no narrative properly sustained: his characters are static formulae about whom we know little more at the end than we do at the beginning; his cutting is generally rough to the point of incoherence; the chill intellectuality of his conceits—conceits often of extraordinary brilliance in themselves—is unrelieved by any suspicion of the humanity which warms the bitterness of *Bicycle Thieves*. You have in the main an impression similar to that of Renoir's *La Bête Humaine*, that here are no finished films, but rough-cuts, mines from which immeasurable treasure can but has not yet been quarried.

To this list of blemishes upon which most admirers of Rossellini would, I think, agree, I must add two personal reactions. Firstly his films strike me, when compared to de Sica's, as unnecessarily verbose. Here again the absence of a properly worked-out script may be to blame. While obviously no director of spirit should be frightened of sound to make his point when need be, dialogue ought only to be used in cases where he is satisfied that the particular point cannot be made visually with any neatness. This is, I suggest, of particular importance in Italian films; twenty years of dubbed American pictures have so profoundly vitiated the ears of Italian technicians that they are satisfied with soundtracks of a quality more abject than are to be found in the most inept of British films. The waves of low-quality noise in which all Rossellini films,

including *The Miracle*, are smothered, tend to come between me and my enjoyment of them.

Secondly—and this is a literary rather than a technical criticism—for me the bitter inverted puritanism of Rossellini's attitude towards sex, a puritanism that informs *The Miracle* in common with his earlier films, can in the long run become fatiguing. I am not, I hasten to say, arguing for the simpering evasions with which the subject is generally handled by the Anglo-Saxon world—the episode of the "nice girl" turned trollop in *Paisa* is a touching comment upon the invisible damage of war; the lesbian in *Open City* brings into the action, just where it is wanted, a terrifying reminder of the human heart's darkness: the homosexual schoolmaster among the ruins of Berlin makes the cup of horror run over.

Of course, in his evident and perhaps unconscious loathing of sex (which haunts him as the bright eyes of Mary Queen of Scots haunted John Knox), Rossellini pays reluctant tribute at the shrine of Venus. But by never recognising that sex can occasionally leave the mud, he comes gradually, I suggest, to a profoundly false view of human existence. Here is to be found the nagging weakness of *The Miracle*. The fundamental situation upon which the whole film turns is fake.

Rossellini has never shown himself capable of sustained inspiration. He was obviously at his most comfortable in the six short stories which went to make up *Paisa*. Here in *The Miracle* he essays the long short story, running for some 40 minutes. This time the ravages of war are deserted. Nature—the Sorrentine Peninsula, I suspect—affords a radiant frame to his story. It is the story of a peasant woman (Anna Magnani) slightly weak in the head, and affected by religious mania. Guarding her flocks one day, she falls in with a mysterious stranger whom for no explicable reason she takes to be St. Joseph. Shortly afterwards she finds herself pregnant, and jumps to the conclusion that she is gestating a Messiah. The village turns against her, mocks and insults her; at the end she stumbles up the precipitous hills to deliver the child in an abandoned monastery. The film ends with the first whimpers of the baby.

English critics have been almost unanimous in praising Anna Magnani's performance: and, to be just, without her there would be very little film. But with her, I suggest that there is still not very much. Miracles, or at any rate belief in them, are a commonplace of Italian life; but the great situation, the clamour of the village against the Magnani, simply won't do. Whatever their defects, Italian villagers—particularly in the South—have immense respect for pregnancy in any form. In real life they might have smiled at the Magnani's pretention to beget a Messiah, but they would nevertheless have treated her with every tenderness. Italian village life is miserable, no doubt, and often cruel: but pregnancy invariably draws from the Italian peasant a compassion which is rarely to be seen in colder countries.

It is not like the old Rossellini to depend for his effect upon the art of one player and a situation which is fundamentally false. I cannot help suspecting that when removed from the silent bitterness of ruined cities, he feels lost—though *Stromboli*, I hope, may prove me wrong.

Books

THE ART OF OUR AGE

Ernest Lindgren

The Art Of The Film (published by Allen & Unwin) became an additional choice in February for the Readers' Union, and Mr. Lindgren has written a note on the motives that impelled him to write his book. We feel that this will be of interest to those who know The Art Of The Film as well as to those who have not yet read it.

THE ART OF THE FILM has been described as the only new art form of our time. This may seem too sweeping a statement in view of the claims of photography or broadcasting, or the as yet unborn art of television, but if all these are regarded not as separate developments but more properly as parts of a single development, this claim for the film becomes more reasonable. The last hundred years, embracing, in order, the inventions of photography, the telephone, the gramophone, the silent film, broadcasting, the sound film, the colour film, television, and (for this is now with us, too) the stereoscopic film, have witnessed a technological revolution which may well be more important to the future development of our civilisation than the invention of printing.

Before 1830 all that men saw and heard was immediate and elusive, except in so far as it could be laboriously described by the artist and writer; but since 1830 it has become possible to record and to transmit across space and through time actual reproductions of the impressions which reach our eyes and our ears. And, what is more important to our present purpose, it is possible for an artist to take fragments of such recorded impressions and assemble them creatively to produce a work of the imagination; to produce, in fact, a film.

It may be thought that however true this is in theory, the level of the normal output of the cinema is anything but artistic. This criticism must, in the main, be conceded, but it is a criticism not of the cinema itself, but of the use we make of it; and the chief reason we use it badly is an economic one. In other arts, in painting, music and writing, the artist can practise his craft with complete freedom, provided he has some means of livelihood; so that Wordsworth was able to say of the poet, for example, that he must create the taste by which he is to be enjoyed. Film production, however, is so expensive that the individual artist has very little freedom indeed. To make a full-length film of good technical quality in England can hardly cost less than £150,000 to £200,000. Those who invest such sums are naturally anxious to secure a financial return on their capital to justify the risk involved, and they will therefore give their backing only to those films which are likely to have a wide popular appeal.

In the cinema the artist, the creative technician, has virtually no chance to create the taste by which he is to be enjoyed. He cannot march ahead of popular taste. The cinema is a mass art, the folk art, if one may so call it, of our technological, industrialised age. The right of patron-

age which was exercised for the older arts by individual princes and noblemen has in the case of the cinema become the right of the people; and not only their right but their responsibility also.

It is a responsibility of which they are scarcely aware. They look on the cinema as nothing more than a fleeting diversion for tired minds, and they are persuaded to accept from it, and even to be grateful for, something far less than the best it could give. To a large extent, of course, the problem is a social one, and the standards of film taste must be limited by the standards of public education. But even when the public are critical of what they are given, they do not know, for the most part, how to make their criticism articulate, nor do they realise the strength of their own position as the ones who pay the piper. The result is the situation with which we are so familiar, a new and vigorous art form, full of most exciting promise, which is held in contempt both by many of those who make money from it and by many of the intelligent and educated, and which is at the same time patronised by a vast popular audience, inarticulate, unorganised, and unaware of its power.

My purpose in writing *The Art Of The Film* was to attack the situation I have described. Its title is a challenge. It is a challenge not only to those who enjoy going to the cinema, but also to the large number of educated and mature (and I use the word "mature" advisedly, for the cinema audience of to-day is mainly an adolescent one) who go hardly at all. While they continue to ignore the film, it is likely to continue to deserve their indifference, and the influence of the cinema in our society is too great and too insidious to be ignored. They must approach it, however, with positive interest and even affection, for the way of reform and censorship applied from aloof is doomed to failure.

In case the description of my book as an "attack" may mislead you, I should perhaps make it clear that it is not a polemic. It does not argue a case. What it does is to survey the possibilities of the film as an art form and offer an introduction to informed film criticism.

The questions on the cinema which were put to me in my professional work, and the many lectures I have been asked to give on the subject, convinced me that there was a real need for a book of this kind. It is as true of film-going as of any other human activity, from a game of tennis to a promenade concert, that those who enjoy it most are those who know most about it.

REVIEWS

DESIGNING FOR FILMS by Edward Carrick.

The Studio Publications 18/-. Revised and expanded edition.

EDWARD CARRICK writes from 22 years experience of cinema. His knowledge of its potentialities as art is as great as his awareness of its misuse in routine production. Lucid, concise, sometimes anecdotal, sometimes angrily critical, Mr. Carrick writes above all as an artist with tremendous faith in the importance of the film medium and its future.

Belonging to the "How To Do It" series, "Designing For Films" is primarily a textbook for students, showing how it *is* done in studios as well as how, in the author's opinion, it should be done. The book is therefore essentially practical, touching on theory only in so far as it explains certain general aims or particular methods.

Thus the description of how designs are conceived is brief, and does no more than indicate the existence of fundamental principles in the relationship between figure and background, the source of light, the continuity from picture to picture, the composition of sets for camera movement and so forth, without analysing these principles or their application in different cases.

Studio procedure, on the other hand, is described with precision and in detail. In doing this Mr. Carrick is ever on the alert to warn against common errors and to protest against those in authority who cling to worn-out rules, neglect their moral and artistic obligations and treat artists "like slot machines".

Perhaps the most illuminating section is the one in which the author describes his own method of procedure, from the initial wanderings round bookshops and junk stalls in search of knowledge, to the thumbnail sketches of the climaxes in the script, on to the detailed plans, and the intricate processes of construction. In designing old buildings Mr. Carrick likes to imagine their history, the transformations they may have undergone under various owners. He insists, too, on giving the spectator a chance to use *his* imagination in completing the picture, stressing the dangers of over-elaboration and the importance of selection and suggestion.

The colour film, though still suffering from growing pains, is reaching technical standards which should soon enable the artist to develop it as a new and powerful medium of expression. In a short chapter, characteristically critical of the commercial exploitation which has kept the use of colour down at fair-ground level, the author gives a clear idea of the serious technical limitations which still exist—the problems of colour reflection upon colour, the designer's inability to control laboratory processes and the resulting colour distortions, etc.—and indicates with equally characteristic enthusiasm the new scope the medium will provide for the experimentally minded artist.

Detailed and methodical chapters on woodwork, plaster work, set painting, trick shots, the property department and film effects provide a store of information for the student and answer those "how was it done" questions which have probably aroused the curiosity of many a

layman. There is also a fascinating appendix on perspective and the use of different lenses.

The drawings, stills and diagrams with which the book is lavishly illustrated, are beautifully selected and reproduced, some of them explaining, as they were intended to, more about the principles of harmony, balance of form, reflected light, cast shadows and other elements pertaining to the theory of design than does the text. In this respect the text is slightly tantalising, often reminding the reader how much there is in the art of designing movies that has yet to be formulated. But, I should repeat, theory does not fall within the scope of this volume, though it may be hoped it will be the subject of one of the forthcoming works by Mr. Carrick, who realises better than anyone how little has so far been written on any of the many aspects of film design.

CATHERINE DE LA ROCHE.

DER ERHOBENE ZEIGEFINGER, by George Böse. (Baden-Baden, Neue Verlags-Anstalt G.m.b.H., 1948. Specially published for the film weekly, *Die neue Filmwoche*).

THE AMBITIOUS SUB-TITLE of this 90-page booklet, "Film Censorship, its History and Sociology", is not quite justified. It is an outline of the censorship problem now to be faced by the new German film industry—admittedly a formidable one in a country accustomed to police rule and ideological regimentation. Catholic objections to Käutner's *Der Apfel Ist Ab* are the author's starting point. He traces the history of German film censorship back to the fun-fair days, followed by a period of hypocritical "sex instruction" films which went together with advertisements such as "the darkest cinema in town". Prior to World War I, the cinema as such, and not only certain films, was considered objectionable; censorship powers were vested in the hands of local police chiefs. The introduction of the Reichs Film Law in May 1920, by the Weimar Parliament, ended a brief interregnum of complete freedom from censorship throughout 1919—the year in which *Caligari* was made. The Weimar law was liberal and democratic, but Goebbels' rowdy demonstrations against *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1931) forced the Government to introduce a restrictive amendment. The Nazi Film Law of 1934 decreed subjugation of the film industry under the totalitarian State, including, for the first time in censorship history, "offence against artistic taste" among the reasons for banning a film: a most dangerous precedent. Böse gives a number of interesting examples of censored films and sequences since 1931. The end of the war was the beginning of Allied censorship, which has now ceased, leaving German film-workers and producers to develop their own devices. Böse pleads for self-censorship. Since his booklet was published, however, the row about *Oliver Twist* has resulted in the establishment of a municipal *Filmprüfstelle* in Western Berlin (May 1949), which may well herald a new period of censorship "from above" for Western Germany. It seems as if the German just cannot do without being told what to see and what not.

EGON LARSEN.

Documentary

EYES AND NO EYES

Short films seen abroad

Patricia Hutchins



"Seal Island," a Walt Disney production, directed by James Algar.

I NO LONGER REMEMBER what reward came to "Eyes" or what disaster happened to "No Eyes" in the children's story. Perhaps the meaning was in the names themselves. And there was another tale, or maybe the same, about one prisoner who saw nothing from his cell window and another who noticed a hundred things.

This realisation of the power of seeing must come to most people. Few retain the ability to use their own eyes. Films in particular are full of the clichés of secondary vision—wind-blown clouds, electric pylons, wheat fields and sun bonnets, those documentary housewives tilted at the sky. . . . Serious films are often worse than the entertainment cinema, for there the human element varies, and efforts are often made to find something "new", eye-surprising.

Productions from sixteen or more countries, brought together in Paris recently by Jean Painlevé in the 11th *Congrès du Film Scientifique et Technique*, illustrate certain visual and representational tendencies. Contributed rather

than selected, the programme contained several of those vaguely conceived films which are neither a record of original research nor general instruction. With the inevitable lab-assistant holding up the test tubes, or mechanical harvesters and over-active diagrams, they either tell the student or specialist what he knows already or present much undigested and badly-arranged material.

A few of these films—which shall remain nameless—served to set off a number of excellent shorts which left no doubt as to their purpose. The clear-cut technical exposition, the carefully balanced music and commentary, use of models and dramatic lighting of *Stabilité d'une jetée à Talus*, show how an apparently uninteresting subject, such as building a sea-wall, can both demonstrate a method and become a film of aesthetic value. Part of a series made in Grenoble at the Neypric Hydraulics Laboratory, much of the material had already been used as a means of investigating and recording certain tests carried out by Professor Danel and his staff there.

Vanishing Africa, from the State Information Service, deals with soil erosion in terms of that country. Using a soft, greyish tone, the photography gives an impression of the land itself, its variations of soil and climate, beautifully conveyed at times. Towards the end, raucous music set to bulldozers spoils its quiet build-up of rhythm and good timing. Too many directors are content to use this convention instead of thinking out a better way of suggesting mechanical work. In *Louisiana Story*, Flaherty dealt with the problem imaginatively and gave the oil derrick a puppet-doll, almost maniacal personality for a moment or two. There is no reason, for instance, why machines in this African setting might not have been seen through the eyes of a child or an old man.

Seal Island, with an Academy Award, is straightforward documentary in Technicolor, which suggests that eventually Disney might well leave aside some of his commercial fun and be of importance in the serious cinema. Directed by James Algar, it results from more than three or four months spent filming the love and parental life of seals on an island in the Bering Sea. On the whole that problem of matching shot to shot within the script sequences to keep the story going and yet avoid abrupt colour jumps, has been admirably overcome. Sound and music are also well united. As publicity puts it, this "auspiciously sets the pace for the producer's *True Life Adventure* subjects, a departure from his usual product and one upon which he lavishes unstinted effort and calculated audience appeal".

It is not often that the scientist is both a good filmmaker and has an eye for colour and shape. Monsieur Tazieff, who presented an account of an expedition to *Mount Kenya*, immediately recognises what is visually important, and avoiding those dreadful preliminaries of camps and over-burdened porters, concentrates on giving a sense of the place itself. After seeing the film one has, in fact, *been* in that strange country, almost touched its flowers and brilliant vegetation; because, I believe, M. Tazieff had been continually aware of us as participators long before we came together as an audience.

It seems that a new colour process was used in his further film recording the living volcano of *Stromboli* in Africa. Shots of the great red stream of lava flowing through dark caves at night and then down towards the sea, would never have caused that murmur of amazement if the attempt had been made in black and white. Unfortunately I did not see a further film, *Hail of Fire*, which was taken during the eruption of the volcano Kitura in the Belgian Congo, in the mouth of the volcano itself, where Tazieff and his friend Tendeur succeeded in getting down some 200 metres.

Another use of the film in carrying out observations, which would otherwise have been impossible, was shown in *Dance des Abeilles* made by Professor Otto Storch, of Vienna. Certain movements, a ritual maybe, are made by the bee in the hive and these are related to sources of light and the distance travelled in search of honey. Without advancing a hard-and-fast theory, this study was presented as an "observation", which the Congrès debated at some length.

As a reminder that ideas are more important than technical advance, the programme included a film incorporating many of Marey's early studies in movement—from ducks and flies, to horses and athletes—introduced

by M. Nogues, haed of the Institut Marey. Scientific study may have been uppermost, but behind the simple presentation, the careful analysis, there was also the man of selective vision, who realised, perhaps, the grace and pleasure that the cinema might convey. To judge what has been achieved, we were also to see Frank Well's beautifully poised colour exposition on *The Circulation of the Blood*.

We also had the opportunity of seeing a film by Dr. Clauoué on *Psychologie et Chirurgie Esthetique*. Having operated on several children of a family, all with a tendency to outstanding ears, he used them to build up the story of how one child became aware of his defect, suffered at school, gradually became introspective, a future neurotic in fact. Then after undergoing an operation, he takes his place at home and at school with greatly increased confidence. The quiet observation and humour of this little film overlies its much more important implications.

Having missed *Le Sang des Bêtes*, made by Georges Franju, who has assisted Jean Painlevé on a number of productions, I had the curious experience of following this film through someone else's memory of it. A French friend described its objective statement of facts concerning the main slaughter houses of Paris, the curious surrealist atmosphere, the animals seen communicating their suspicion to one another, the mask of the humane killer fitted on, the out-rush of blood on the camera, the audience. . . .

The test of a film, after all, is the sequence of images it gives us to project again for the mind's eye. Yet there are far too many people making films who do not know how to *see*, little less think.



"*Le Sang des Bêtes*": in the abattoir.

Amateur Activities

ON STUDYING THE FILM

John Francis Lane

THERE IS A SCENE in *Rendez-vous de Juillet*, the new film of Jacques Becker (the director of *Goupi Mains Rouges* and *Antoine et Antoinette*) in which one of the characters (the young "Existentialists" of Paris to-day), is reprimanded by his father for lounging about and neglecting his future career. The boy, a photographer, is waiting for his friend, the hero of the film, to set out on an exploring expedition, hoping to accompany him and take the photographs. The father points to an imposing document on the wall, reminding his son that the diploma of "IDHEC" has yet to be justified.

When this film is shown in London, there is every reason to believe that, with the majority of the public, the reference to "IDHEC" will be dismissed as another remark that could not be translated into the sub-titles. The response would be much the same outside Paris and perhaps even inside with a large proportion of filmgoers, for "IDHEC" (or to translate from the idiomatic jargon of to-day, "L'Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques"), although now five years old, is still comparatively unknown.

This is not altogether true, or there would not be twenty-six different nationalities among the contemporary students, coming as they do from all parts of the world (except Scandinavia or the Soviet Union notably, although there are quite a few "refugees" from Eastern Europe). But obviously word has reached across the globe through the enthusiasm and gratitude of students who have found at "IDHEC" their opportunity to study the medium to which they are so devoted. Apart from an experimental school for actors and directors in Rome and a similar one in New York, under the direction of Hans Richter, the only comparable Institution to "IDHEC" is the famous State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow which was, of course, founded by Eisenstein.

The French school owes its inspiration to the well-known director, Marcel L'Herbier, who is still honorary President and takes as active an interest in the organisation as his current filming will allow. The actual direction of studies is in the very competent hands of Jean Lods, whose work as a documentary director has won praise equally from Moscow and John Grierson.

The Institute offers courses in Direction, Photography, Editing and Film Design, as well as for Continuity Girls. The greater number of students, inevitably, are studying to be directors, and this course of study ("Réalisation-Production") is the most comprehensive. It follows, very broadly, the general principles established by Eisenstein's school, although the course is much shorter. Strictly speaking, it covers three years, although the majority appear to remain for two years or even one, according to the extent of previous experience.

We have learned from Eisenstein's writings that the fundamental basis of film study is the absorption of what he terms "montage creation in all cultures". For many

whose minds are more practical in their approach to the cinema (and this, strangely enough, describes most of the French students), the idea of learning about Stanislavsky or Shakespeare; of delving into the past wonders of pre-historic art; or of investigating the intricacies of musical form and rhythm, may seem somewhat unnecessary to the study of the *craft* of a film director. But, although everyone cannot be expected to agree with Eisenstein's conception of cinema as the sublime realisation of all art creation, no one with genuine sympathies for the film will deny that such an education is absolutely essential to the director's *art*.

Here we are up against the film's most extraordinary feature—the relationship between Art and Craft. To a large extent, the studios of the world, but especially of Hollywood, are more concerned with the production of commercial success than with the creation of anything that may tend to merit the label "artistic". The astounding technical virtuosity of the American studios is due as much to the necessity of efficient and speedy production as to any eye for the creative resources of the medium. At "IDHEC" a typical French film producer gives a series of lectures simply titled "Production", in which students with very high ideals are sharply reminded of the nature of the *Industry* into which they are lowering themselves. But whatever the vulgarities of the world's commercial industries, the artist on occasions still finds breathing space, and in his utilisation of the film's technical resources in as perfect harmony as possible with his own artistic instincts, he will be contributing something of value to civilisation's unique invention, the Cinema.

When a boy or girl arrives at the point where he or she feels ready to enter the film business, there are a number of alternative approaches offered to them. The most obvious, and to judge by the examples of so many directors, the most effective, is to go into the Theatre, in any capacity, but preferably as an actor, even if not a good one. Then, when the cinema beckons, one can change mediums or, if there is no invitation, one's own initiative must be set to work. The second, and perhaps the most general approach, is to begin at the bottom of the industry itself. This is an altogether admirable intention but quite impractical in these days of mass unemployment and the restrictions that the Unions consequently are obliged to enforce.

The third approach, that of a "school", is perhaps open to a charge of being "intellectual" but, in the case of "IDHEC", the aspect which I have described and which involves the study of various art histories, is only a side-light to the more general technical course. One may study the history of the cinema, under the guidance of Georges Sadoul, France's foremost film historian; one may study "Doctrines du Cinéma", that is to present one's own theories on film matters; one may make an "Analyse du

film" and learn better than most of the cinema's pundits how to criticise a film intelligently; but, finally, it is practical work which fires the imagination of the true film enthusiast.

This practical study at "IDHEC" is carefully planned and during the early terms takes a largely theoretical form. To learn the essentials of film technique is obviously the first necessity and for foreigners this can be quite a revelation as far as phraseology is concerned. The studio of "IDHEC" at St. Cloud (about as far out of Paris as Richmond is from London, and equally pleasant), is excellently equipped. In the studio cutting rooms, students have the chance to unravel what is perhaps the most complicated of all the cinema's professions, overwhelmingly dominated by questions of science but upon which rests also the whole principle of the film's artistic values.

For the benefit of those who are destined to become Assistant Directors or Production Managers, there is a thorough rehearsal of the ways in which a "breakdown" (or "dépouillement") of a shooting script is accomplished. This involves an analysis in most elaborate detail of all the action and consequent requirements on the set, from the decor and extras to the smallest prop. Also, under the same heading, one is taught how to plan a "shooting schedule", something especially important in these times of limited budgets.

The knowledge that is acquired of technique is realised in the planning of actual shooting scenes, which are first of all sketched on paper and then put into practice with actors and crew, though without actually shooting. Later,

in the second year, the opportunity comes to work actually on the set under studio conditions and reconstruct, according to the students' own interpretation, such films as *Le Corbeau* or *Le Silence est d'Or*.

Although aspirations are chiefly for the director's chair, this privileged position will not follow immediately after one has "graduated" at "IDHEC". From the point of view of a foreign student, this Diploma does not even entitle one to a passport to the French studios, as it can do for the French students. Most of us will be obliged to return to our own lands. For those who come from India or Israel or Brazil there is a great future: their home industries are in their infancy and eager to receive young ideas. The British or American students are not so fortunate, for a diploma of "IDHEC" is not even sufficient excuse to join the Unions, let alone be engaged as Carol Reed's or John Ford's Second Assistant. It may be necessary to search for experience where new talent is given encouragement: to follow Cavalcanti or Clouzot to Brazil or Orson Welles to Africa, or, better still, to attempt to join with the inspiring "new" forces that are driving the Italian cinema to first place in world esteem. For to study the film is a commendable step. But always there is at the back of the film student's mind the day when will arrive that first opportunity to realise his or her own ideas in practice.

Letters of enquiry concerning entry to "IDHEC" should be addressed to the Directeur-Général, I.D.H.E.C., 92, Av. des Champs Elysées, Paris 8.

CORRESPONDENCE

"Operational Research"

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND,

Sir,—I am presuming that you made sure that the letter purporting to come from Sir Robert Watson-Watt was not in point of fact a hoax. I am also presuming that many people will feel that ridicule is the best answer, and will seize this chance of sharpening their darts and aiming them at a sitting target. But Sir Robert will doubtless dismiss any such attacks as highbrow, effete, Third Programme or some such. He will probably carry on regardless so someone had better take him seriously.

He should know then that the film industry is both a business and an art, and is not a science. What it lacks is not scientific common sense but ordinary common sense. Science cannot determine the proper path to follow, for the industry is not like others. No film is the same as another, though this is often hard to believe.

Films are made by individuals, and this unhappy fact means that science is soon up against such elements as taste, style and talent. The degree to which process shots, pre-planning and television aids can be used depends on the individuals who are making the film, the subject of the film, the audience at which it is aimed, and the amount of money available. These factors are never constant, and consequently offer no fodder for the slide-rule.

I could tell Sir Robert in great detail in what circumstances I personally think I would use which process, but it would take a very long time, and I am probably as fallible as the next fellow. Every circumstance is different. Everybody's taste is different. Everyone will give him a different answer. I'm afraid I regard this as a good thing, although he will not regard it as very helpful.

I ask him most earnestly to consider that he might be on the wrong track.

Yours faithfully,
PETER PRICE.

A Phoenix for £9,250

Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Sir,—Perhaps as an innocent in the film world I can explain the imminent collapse of British films and predict the course of their phoenix-like rebirth from the ashes. Too many directors are directing films from the urge to maintain a steady high income, or from habit, whose experience of life is limited to their fellow workers and their fellow drinkers.

The Italian director goes out into the dusty streets with a camera and creates a notable film on next to nothing. British film directors praise the enterprise and result, and then, clutching in their left hands newspapers announcing that British films are dwindling both in quantity and quality, clench their producers' hands to agree to another £300,000 production doomed to commercial failure from the start. The film will be polished, well lit and photographed, competently acted, and in most cases an artistic as well as a commercial failure. It will cost far too much to make, and lack the fire of inspiration or purpose which strangely seems synonymous with a restricted budget.

A tottering London theatre was revived by plays, players and producers from the provinces and the little theatres, men and women who never had money to burn and had not lost their fervour to create something beautiful and alive.

Successful feature films have been made in recent years, in one case in Czechoslovakia for £7,000, in Italy for £10,000, and many in Sweden for about £15,000. (Mostly, I admit, for distribution in their own countries.) The British film of the future which is going to reawaken dormant film fans will be made by a director excited by its theme, with actors who are not simply starring vehicles fulfilling their contract arrangements, but with the same enthusiasm as the director for their work.

Its cost should be less than £10,000. My budget would be, for a planned three months' shooting in which the main characters have

learned their parts beforehand, and in which the author is also the director and editor.

Location for nine weeks

Director: £10 a week and 1 per cent. of profits.

Lighting cameraman: £20 a week and ½ per cent. of profits.

Assistant camera and continuity: £10 a week.

Sound recordist: £15 a week and ½ per cent. of profits.

Production, business and publicity manager: £15 a week and ½ per cent. of profits.

Location work would cost £70 a week for nine weeks, making a total of £630 in wages.

Interiors for three weeks

Rent of appropriate interiors at £20 a week: total £60.

Total wages of unit for three weeks, £210.

Thus a total of 12 weeks would cost £900. Six actors at £50 a week would cost £3,600. Extras would cost £250, laboratory work and film stock £3,500, music, effects and travelling expenses, £1,000. Total production cost £9,250.

The profits would go back to the company, and be available to finance a similar project.

Yours faithfully,

DENIS BRIAN.

Mr. Brian expresses what many people doubtless feel in general about the British film industry. Unfortunately, remedies are never as simple as diagnoses. One cannot draw up budgets in a vacuum—without taking into consideration, for example, the Union attitude. It should certainly be feasible to produce a phoenix-film for £9,250 (though perhaps the director, since he is also to be author and editor, is getting underpaid); but the problem is firstly a human one, secondly economic.

Audience Reaction in Film Societies

Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Sir,—I believe provincial towns are very backward in film appreciation. Even where there appears to be considerable activity in the way of specialised cinema, there is just not enough critical appreciation to ensure the satisfaction of anyone approaching a student or connoisseur attitude. The trouble, of course, starts with the audiences. It would be stretching the theory of probability too far to suggest that one example of inattention, crude perception, distorted cinematic values and the like properties of commercial cinema patrons, found at each society meeting I attend, does not indicate a fairly general condition. One feels the audience reaction and it does not feel good to me. If you listen to the conversations and opinions, if any, before and after (yes, and during) the shows, you feel that much of the audience is simply paying for privacy, an assured seat and, tell it not, something *excitingly* unusual.

Manchester is the worst I have experienced after Glasgow, London and Swindon (whose management I know to be above reproach). Canoodling, toffee-sucking and galumphing departures in the climactic fine moments are striking features of Manchester's film societies' meetings.

Big societies suffer from impersonality. One never meets the organisers. One is ushered, or rather directed, by disinterested employees. The benefits of a 35 mm. house are hardly paid for. Glasgow is fortunate, of course.

The Institute's new service for special members, the film party arrangement, would be an extremely welcome arrangement in the provinces. It might, in another form, help solve the equipment problem, as many small groups could meet on different occasions with the same perfect equipment.

Yours faithfully,

B. S. CRONE.

Mushroom Festivals

Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Sir,—I wish to protest against the impression of incorrectness which your article on film festivals in the December, 1949, number of SIGHT AND SOUND has made on me. You quote the "mushroom"

festivals, and include Marianske-Lazne in Czechoslovakia and Knokke in Belgium. It is remarkable that you write at length about the "mushroom" festival at Knokke and even reproduce a picture from *Bicycle Thieves*, which was awarded first prize there; but Marianske-Lazne you only mention as being "a field-day for the left", which was certainly not meant by you as a compliment.

But your information about Marianske-Lazne is completely inaccurate. In 1949 the fourth international film festival took place there. The British film *Scott of the Antarctic* was awarded a prize for film music. A larger number of countries than at any other festival participated, such as U.S.S.R., Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, U.S.A., every one of them with feature films.

I visited this festival and was also at Marianske-Lazne in 1948. In 1947 I visited the film festival in Brussels. Concerning other festivals, I keep in touch by conscientiously reading reports. In my belief no other festival is on as high a level as Marianske-Lazne, where a free and keen discussion took place at length on whatever subject could be of value to film art or industry. Everyone could participate in this discussion, and in the first place all invited guests, film directors and journalists (including Miss Hills of *The Times*).

My opinion is that you have to withdraw the unkind and unjust term of "mushroom" festival concerning Marianske-Lazne. My opinion is also that it is a weakness in your review that you do not dedicate one word to the extremely important mass film festivals (held in enormous open air moving picture theatres) with a jury of labourers, which were held at Pilsen, Most, Gottwaldov, Ostrava and Bratislava in Czechoslovakia. In 1948, moreover, such a festival took place in Gottwaldov when it was still called Zlin. I have been to visit them, and in my opinion they surpass everything that has been shown in the domain of festivals.

You write about documentary films and documentarists. Not only do you neglect the Soviet film and allow to pass the historical error that Grierson is "the father of documentary" without comment, but you keep complete silence about the World Union of Documentarists, whose congress at Marianske-Lazne was attended by your countrymen Basil Wright and Donald Alexander.

And, last but not least, you do not even mention the important resolution accepted at Marianske-Lazne in 1949 by all film people and journalists attending there, a resolution to protect peace, which was also signed by your countryman Ralph Bond and on which appear 60 signatures of the most prominent film directors and theoreticians in the world. I name G. W. Alexandrov, Paul Strand and Louis Daquin.

Yours truly,

JULES DE LEEUWE.

One judges the level of a film festival by the quality of the films shown there. Comparing the lists of films shown at Cannes (which include The Third Man, Queen of Spades, Rendezvous de Juillet, Occupe-Toi d'Amélie, Pacific 231, The Set-Up, Act of Violence, Seal Island, Riso Amaro, Palle Alene I Verden) and Venice (Berliner Ballade, Mulino sul Po, The Quiet One, The Snake Pit, Au Carrefour de la Vie, Manon, Kind Hearts and Coronets) with the programme at Marianske-Lazne—Scott of the Antarctic, the disappointing Michurin (prized above Sierra Madre), the monumental but chaotic Battle of Stalingrad, Blue Scar, Johnny Belinda—one sees that the first two festivals offered more rewarding programmes. Since Dr. de Leeuwe gives no details of the "mass film festivals" held at Pilsen, Most, Gottwaldov, etc., except that they were judged by labourers, it is difficult to know how they might surpass the others mentioned.

The resolution of the "most prominent" film makers in the world,—of which Dr. de Leeuwe's selection is, to say the least, curious—may well be important, but that remains to be seen. In the last few years many distinguished people have foregathered and drawn up official "declarations" to protect peace; while one respects the motives behind them, one may perhaps be pardoned a certain amount of cynicism as to the practicability of results.

There was no reference to Grierson as "the father of documentary" in SIGHT AND SOUND, nor did we give the Knokke festival more than one line of space (in 8 pt.). While France sent Les Parents Terribles and Les Amants de Vérone to Knokke, the British and American films did not compare with those at Cannes or Venice—although, of course, they were superior to those at Marianske-Lazne.

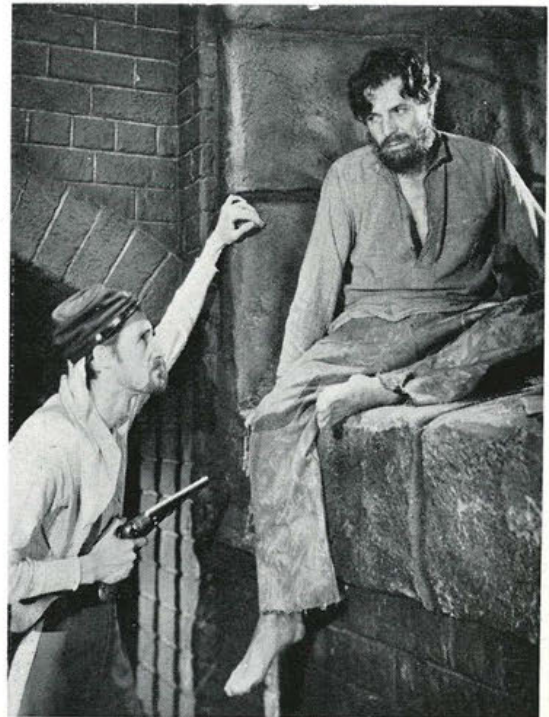
COMPETITION

No. 2. The six stills below are from films made several years ago (between 1935 and 1940) by British and American directors who have since become well known and in some cases internationally famous. Can you identify (a) the films, and (b) the directors?

The usual prizes (book tokens for 25s. and 10s. 6d.) for the first

and second correct entries to be opened. Closing date, April 10th. Entries should be addressed to SIGHT AND SOUND, British Film Institute, 164, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.C.2, with "Competition" marked on top left-hand corner of envelope.

Results of Competition No. 1 will be announced next month.

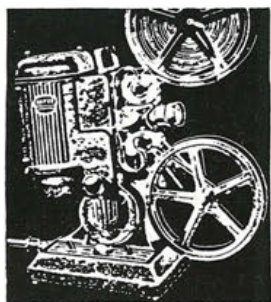


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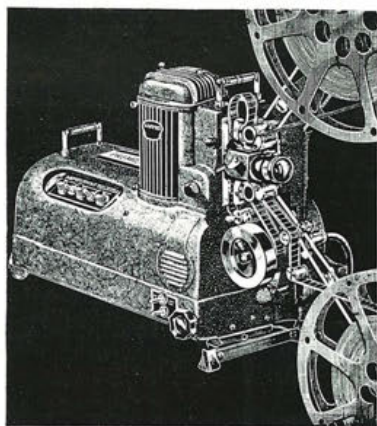
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